

VIOLETTA

A ROMANCE

AFTER THE GERMAN

OF

URSULA ZÖGE VON MANTEUFFEL

BY

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TRANSLATOR OF "THE LADY WITH THE RUBIES" "VAIN FOREBODINGS"
"QUICKSANDS" ETC



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VIOLETTA

CHAPTER I

VELZIN'S GENTLE MISTRESS

“ONCE upon a time there was a king who lived in a very——”

“Oh, Hanna, you're not telling it the right way at all. ‘A king who had——’”

“To be sure; I forgot. Who had on this very spot——”

“On this very spot! Only think!” with a shudder of delicious dread,—“just here, where the water is!”

“But if you interrupt me so, you silly children, I shall never get to the end of the story. This king had here on this very spot, where the ‘King's Lake’ now is, a magnificent castle, built of pure gold, and marble, and ebony, and ivory, all set with rubies and emeralds. The windows were of diamonds, and the pavement of solid silver——”

We will avail ourselves of the pause which the wonder and delight of the youthful audience made necessary here, to take a look at the place which was the scene of the legend.

The ‘King's Lake’!

Does not the name instantly suggest majestic mountain-chains, wooded banks, and charming villas? All

such imaginings are doomed, however, to disappointment.

‘The King’s Lake’ is no geographical celebrity. The young story-teller, with her very youthful listeners, is seated upon the broad breast of a dam, and before them lies one of those placid inland lakes which abound in what was once the Electorate. Upon the smooth surface of the water, among the broad leaves and white flowers of the water-lilies, are myriads of pinkish blossoms; the shrill ery of the bittern is heard among the reeds near the shore, and a gray curlew screams overhead as he wings his way across the lake.

“And this king was very good,” Hanna began again. “But once, as he was walking in the forest, he met a beautiful lady with long black hair all wreathed with water-lilies. She was wrapped from head to foot in a silvery veil. The king took her home to his castle and made her queen over all the land. The marriage was celebrated with the greatest pomp and splendor; but when the king looked out of his window the next morning, he—— Look! there comes our father across the moor!”

“Then, hurry, hurry, Hanna; tell us the end!”

“Oh, you all know it.”

“No matter for that. Who would tell a story and leave off the end?”

“Well, then,—All the air was turned into clear green water, and strange creatures, half fish, half man, were sailing about in pink shells, and red coral was growing like flowers out of the crevices of the rocks. The queen was a water-witch; and as she could not live out of the water, she had changed the kingdom into a lake. And even now sometimes in the night

there can be heard the wailing of the poor captive king, who was once so good, and who was beguiled by a water-witch with no soul."

There was a sigh of profound satisfaction, and then speaker and listeners slipped down from their favorite post of observation and raced across the moor towards a dignified man in the dress of a clergyman who had lately appeared in sight. His fine, strongly-marked features were tanned brown, showing that his days were passed more in the open air than within the walls of a study.

"Have you been to Velzin village, father?" Hanna asked, taking his hand.

"Yes; I have been looking after Michel, who is ill; and now I'm going for a few moments to the manor-house. And so you waited for me here? How did your little legs bring you so far, Ella?" he asked, tenderly, stroking the curly head of the youngest child.

"Oh, Hanna told us the story of the water-king," the child replied, eagerly,—"all pure gold and silver—and—and—ebonry—"

"Ah, probably a newly-discovered and particularly precious metal," the pastor said, with a smile; while little Hanna took her sister's hand after a motherly fashion and led her onwards.

The purple moor of Velzin was an extensive plain covered with a luxuriant growth of heather, broom, and juniper, full of charm for those who have eyes for delicious colour, and for the naturalist, delighting in the busy life of the insect-world.

The Velzin pastor was evidently one to feel this charm, for as he walked he paused frequently and looked about him, drinking in the beauty of the clear autumn day.

Here and there lofty firs stood out sharply against the blue sky like the pines on the Campagna; the air was filled with the sweet breath of the heather, and countless blue butterflies hovered above the purple blossoms, while crickets hidden in the grass rang out their shrill chirp as if myriads of tiny fiddles were being scraped merrily.

The road, furrowed by the broad wheels of wagons, wound around the lake, and from time to time the shore advanced into the water, forming narrow tongues of land, whereon grew slender birches and willows, while in the little bays thus produced the shallow water rippled over silvery gleaming sand.

Upon one spot on the shore stands a noble group of ancient hemlocks which strike the eye even from a great distance. There lies the manor-house of Velzin, an old structure, many-gabled, and provided with numerous pointed towers, all of one uniform gray, walls, towers, gables, and high roofs, from the topmost peak of which the weathercock creaks and moans. The house looks as if it were built of glistening silver-gray shingles and rafters. On clear days the lake mirrors it peacefully, standing in the midst of its ancient trees, with the ivy-grown tower that flanks it; and the climbing roses that clothe the low ramparts on the lake's edge scatter their pink petals upon the surface of the water below. But when a November storm rages, driving the clouds before it, lashing the waters of the lake, and shaking the old trees so that the crows and ravens circle restlessly about the towers, you might dream that you saw before you an enchanted castle about which evil spirits were holding revel.

The manor-house is seldom inhabited, and this

heightens its mysterious charm for the children, whose imagination peoples it with spell-bound princes, fairies, and dwarfs.

Farther down the lake lies the little fishing-village of Velzin, its church tower rising like a black arrow against the sky. Thither the children turned their steps, followed by their father's loving eyes as they vanished among the reeds and high grass. Then he walked on towards the manor-house.

Velzin was a strange, lonely old place, absolutely secluded from the world, and yet it was said that those who, having been born here, had grown to love it, would surely always look back to it with longing, wistfully remembering its repose, its romance, the rustling of the ancient hemlocks by the lake, the sighing of the wind in the juniper-trees on the purple moor, its roadside flowers, and its meadows of waving grain, meadows wrested from the sandy soil by patient labour.

The immediate vicinity of the manor-house was picturesquely wild. Roses were climbing everywhere, over walls, windows, and trunks of trees,—not the roses of modern horticulture, each giant blossom of which would be a wonder if there were no such things as tempests, drought, or spiders, all hostile to the beauty of such petted darlings. The Velzin roses grew luxuriantly wherever they found space, trailing their branches even across the moat. Here and there on the grass-grown paths might be seen a blossom of wild thyme, and why not? In contrast, however, to this lawlessness, there stood right and left on the broad terrace steps a row of green tubs, in which were huge flowering hydrangeas.

The pastor walked up these steps, and, as the hall

door was half open, passed directly into the house, where reigned the dignified repose which so well becomes old houses and old people.

The hall was empty ; a subdued light came through a huge bow-window of stained glass, illuminating the old portraits in dark frames hanging on the walls. The pastor looked around him undecided as to whether he should pass on still farther into the house, when one of the doors in the half-circle of the hall opened, and a middle-aged Fräulein made her appearance ; her sympathetic face was a little swollen, and therefore bound about with a lace kerchief ; she was followed by a footman in a blue and silver livery.

"Ah, here is our good pastor," she sighed. "She asked for you half an hour ago, but she is sleeping now."

"No matter ; I can wait. I have a leisure evening to-night. Has the doctor been to-day ?"

"Yes, yes ; she is so weak, so very weak. The doctor says we must telegraph ; in fact, I did telegraph yesterday evening. She would not let me do it before ; you know just what she is, Herr Pastor. 'I shall be better, Emma,' she said to me constantly ; 'we must not disturb his Excellency.' But she never will be better, although she relished the drink your kind wife sent her very much,—pray tell her so,—and the wild flowers that little Hanna brought her yesterday delighted her. But you must excuse me, Herr Pastor ; I am just going with Friedrich to see that his Excellency's room is in order. The yellow room must be arranged to-morrow for the young master,—but, good heavens ! when can he get here ?"

"Do not let me detain you, Fräulein Emma. I will

go into the garden for a while, and Friedrich can call me when she asks for me."

He turned as he spoke and descended the broad flight of steps leading into the garden, through which he walked to the low wall or rampart upon the edge of the water, where he paused and gazed over the lake. A peaceful picture lay before him. The woods crept down to the water's edge along almost the entire shore. Just below him, at the foot of the wall, rocked an old boat fastened by a chain. Inside it green blades of grass were sprouting, so drenched with rain were its mouldering planks. It should have sunk, but it did not. Like everything else here, it seemed to be stayed by a spell just where it was when the enchanter's wand had waved above it.

On the morrow this house might be a house of mourning, for within it its gracious mistress had been lying ill and suffering for weeks, so patient and so uncomplaining that those around her had hardly suspected the approach of the inexorable foe.

She had been wont to pay a yearly visit to Velzin for her health, and she had always grown stronger in the peaceful air of the place. Perhaps this was because she loved it so; she had been born and had grown up here, an only daughter, an only child. From here she had married and had gone out into the world, but she had never forgotten her Velzin, and when her parents died she had insisted with filial devotion that nothing about the dear old place should be changed,—not a tree cut down, not a new path laid out. Master Andreas, who was gardener, castellan, and steward all in one, cultivated his tulips and lilies as he had done in the time of Madame's honoured grandfather, the deceased Herr Wilhelm von Plattow,

and the hydrangeas in their tubs were still the 'new-fashioned flowers from France,' and the most imposing objects in the garden.

And in the house the stiff, high-backed old furniture stood in the place where it had stood for a century, the old pictures hung on the walls, and in the yellow corner room was the little spinet upon which Madame's grandfather had learned to play when he studied there with his tutor. Its keys still squeaked shrilly when touched, and it looked like a grisly little musical ghost.

And just as she dearly loved all these ancient memories, so did she carry in her faithful heart her Velzin peasants. Well or ill, she never refused to see them. Sometimes for days she was confined to her room with an incessant cough. There she lay upon her lounge, always kind, always ready to give advice, to soothe anger, and to render aid where aid was required.

Suddenly steps were heard approaching the marble rampart, and the pastor started from the reverie in which he had been plunged.

"Ah, it is you, Herr Pastor. How is my mother?" A young man of very distinguished air uttered these words as he came down the garden path. He spoke calmly and deliberately, a slight flush on his cheek was all the token of emotion to be observed in him. His features, almost too severely regular, were stamped with decision of character and strength of intellect, but it seemed hardly possible that the grave, dark eyes could ever flash with merriment, or their glance ever melt with tenderness.

"Ah, Baron Treffenbach, what a surprise this will be for your mother, who, I do not conceal from you, is very ill, far more seriously so than we suspected."

"Why was I not telegraphed for immediately?"

"She would not allow it; she always hoped to be better. We did telegraph yesterday, but it is fortunate that you did not wait for it."

"Yes, a letter received a week ago made me anxious. Without mentioning her illness, the directions she gave me in it seemed like those of a dying woman. I left St. Petersburg with as little delay as possible."

Meanwhile, they had walked back to the house. As no one came to meet them, Baron Treffenbach turned without hesitation towards the sleeping-apartments. He always felt something like awe in visiting this ancient mansion, wherein reigned, it seemed to him, an indescribable atmosphere of romantic mystery. Was it not his mother's early home?

Treffenbach had reached the age of twenty-six, but as yet no woman had rivalled his mother in his heart. To her he rendered the homage of a lover and the devotion due to a saint. All, all had been hers from the time when, long ago, his hand clasped in that of the delicate lady dressed in white, with a rose in her bosom, he had gone to the Velzin village church to learn betimes how a youth can tread the path of life blamelessly.

With his mind filled with such memories he entered his mother's darkened room. When his eyes became accustomed to the dim light he could distinguish the bed against the wall, the curtains looped aside, and the weary head upon the pillow. There she lay, the guide of his childhood, the guardian angel of his youth; she whom he had loved with an ardent, inextinguishable affection to which he had never known how to give expression. There she lay, weary unto death, her eyes closed, her breathing laboured.

He paused for a moment, as if paralyzed with grief.

The change in the pale, emaciated features was greater than he had expected to see, and the foreboding of an irreparable loss fell heavily upon his heart.

In a few moments she opened her eyes, looked at him, and smiled, as if his presence were a delightful dream. He approached her, and as she heard his footstep her gaze grew intent; she half raised her head and whispered incredulously, "Magnus, my darling, is it really you?"

He bent over her and kissed her pale brow in a kind of sacred awe. "Oh, mother, you should have let me know!"

"It came so gradually, dear; I did not wish your father to be told; it is so hard for him to leave just now when he is on duty; and I knew, too, that he wanted to go to Galicia with a hunting-party, and I should be so sorry,—but now they have telegraphed him; for to leave him without one word of farewell—without even seeing him—ah, Magnus, I could not do it!"

Her voice had grown weaker, and as she sank back among the pillows he held to her lips a glass of madeira that stood ready to his hand,—a hand that trembled, although he asked, in a clear, low tone, "Does it give you strength, mother?"

"Yes, yes, dearest; but the sight of you is more refreshing still. What a long, weary journey you have had! But I am so happy to have you with me, I had so much to say to you before I—go. My life has been most rich,—you have made it so. Always be what you are now,—stauneh, true, honest. Never be ashamed to flee from a temptation. Ah, I am talking to the man as if he were still the boy; but you understand me, my darling."

She passed her hand caressingly through his hair as he bent down his head to hide his agitation, his anguish, his tears.

“Do not look so grieved, dear. We must all die, and I am—glad to go; I have often been so weary. I was not fit for the turmoil of life, and I have longed to have the Father of all summon me to my true home; now he is doing it so gently, so kindly. He lays no heavy burdens upon me, but has led me slowly, slowly to his Paradise, and my heart is at rest. What is there to distress me? Our parting? Yes, that is hard, but it will not be for long. My faith is firm, Magnus, that we shall all be together again.”

Her strength did not fail her now; she lay still, with shining eyes resting upon him in inexpressible love.

“I would gladly have lived to see one thing, Magnus,—your marriage. But it causes me no anxiety. She whom you will one day choose for your wife cannot but be one whom I could joyfully call my daughter. For you never will be dazzled by mere beauty,—you will test the glittering gold and be sure that it is pure metal; your wife will be good and true, worthy to be the mistress of Velzin. Am I not right, Magnus?”

He passed his hand over his forehead, and then looked at her. She must have understood the language of his eyes, for she added, half pleased, half in doubt, “Marie Louise?”

“Yes, mother; she alone is like you.”

“It was the dream of your boyhood, Magnus, and you have been constant to it; your happiness will be assured. She is a very pearl of truth, honour, and feminine nobility of character. Her heart——” she hesitated, but, as if some consoling suggestion had oc-

curred to her, she added, "Her heart you will surely awaken. For your sake I trust this will be so. Marie Louise is as pure and brilliant as a diamond, and now as cold and hard. Still, it becomes her; we would not wish her to be less sternly honest, but——"

"Do not be troubled, mother. She is dear to me as she is. I would not have her otherwise. We are in thorough accord. I understand her words and her acts as if they were my own; and I think it is the same on her part. I know she prefers me to others, and for me she is the one woman who can make me happy. If I cannot win her, I shall hardly marry,—you know what I think of the women of to-day."

"Marie Louise will not say you nay, and her grandparents will gladly know you the heir of Ravenhorst. Ah, Magnus, it will be the second time that a Treffenbach woos and wins a Louise von Plattow! My dearest, may you be blest, as I have been, in richest measure——"

The last words were scarcely audible, and the mother's eyes, now weary again, slowly closed. Her hand rested in her son's, and he sat motionless beside her, watching the slumber that might bring some renewal of strength.

The sun set; Fräulein Emma brought in a shaded lamp, and with much gesticulation signed to Baron Treffenbach to leave his post, since his supper waited; but he disregarded her request, and sat still until his mother opened her eyes again, and went on in a weak voice, as if no interruption had occurred, "He was coming too—my good Pastor Ehrhardt; tell him that the money is all ready for the sewing-school; he has the papers. His wife, my dear, faithful Serena, will see

that it is what I hoped to make it. And you, Magnus, will not forget my people: I know that."

Again her mind seemed to wander, and she muttered disconnected sentences, while her son listened eagerly for every word that might tell him of some duty to perform for her. So the long night wore on. The fading life still fluttered its wings on the borders of the dark valley, and the tired eyes seemed to say each time that they opened, "What! still alive?"

The soul could not forsake the body while one intense desire was still unfulfilled, one farewell unspoken; a longing to speak this word prolonged the final struggle.

The morning brought no decided change. She slept quietly; but as each breath might be the last, Baron Treffenbach could not consent to leave her for more than a few moments at a time.

Towards noon she seemed to be stronger, and received Pastor Ehrhardt with a smile. He came, not with any presumptuous idea of preparing her for death,—ah, she had long been prepared for the great change,—but rather to strengthen his own faith by beholding her perfect trust and resignation. She gave him kind words of farewell for his wife and little ones, who had been her special friends in the village, and after he had taken his leave the day passed quietly, until just as night was falling the wheels of a carriage were heard, and the sick woman raised her head. "He has come, Magnus," she said, with a smile of content.

Treffenbach arose and left the room. As he did so he heard in the distance the rattle of a sabre, and a loud, clear voice saying, in surprise, "What? Is my son here too?"

"Yes, father," the young man replied, as he entered the hall.

"God bless you, my boy! But tell me, for heaven's sake, is it anything serious?"

His Excellency General von Treffenbach was a man of a very distinguished appearance. Judging from his rank and preferment, he should have been between sixty and seventy years old, but no one seeing him for the first time would have thought him much past fifty. A brilliant military career, which he owed to his personal qualifications and his mental superiority, had borne him victoriously over the crest of this world's wave. If, as his detractors avowed, he were in reality a cold-hearted, ambitious man of the world, a thorough egotist, he certainly possessed a personal charm to which much is forgiven and in which his son was totally lacking.

"I am afraid, sir," said Treffenbach, looking his father heroically in the face, "that you must prepare for the worst."

"What, what? Good heavens! Magnus! is she dead?"

"Not yet."

His father threw aside his cloak. "I must see her immediately," he said, in great agitation. "Not the least idea of this. The despatch bade me come to her, for she was ill. Of course I came as soon as possible. What is it? The old trouble?"

"So it seems. The lungs are terribly affected."

"I am shocked,—horribly shocked! But we must not give up hope, my boy. Your poor mother was always delicate, always ailing. Perhaps she may recover from this attack."

Magnus, who had preceded his father, silently opened the door of his mother's room.

At the first glance at his wife General Treffenbaeh grew very pale: he could not but perceive that there was no hope; and he suddenly became vividly conscious that for more than twenty-seven long years the gentle woman dying there had been to him the most faithful, affectionate, and considerate of wives.

Touched to the soul, he pressed fervently to his lips the hand which she held towards him, and said in a low voice, "Ah, Louise, I never dreamed—"

He could not go on, and for a moment there was silence, her gaze resting upon him with intense affection, and yet she seemed to be looking not at him, but back in thought over the long years passed together. "Thanks, Constantin," she whispered at last, carrying his hand to her lips.

"You!—to me!" he exclaimed, deeply moved.

"Twenty-seven years!" she went on, and again a happy smile stole over her face, "and always—so happy. Thanks! thanks!"

Her son had softly left the room. The moment was too sacred even for his presence.

He stood in the anteroom, looking out of the window, without really seeing anything. Those two human beings, of whom he had always thought together as his parents, must part. It was a double death, for were not their souls knit together in indissoluble union?

Oh, it was cruel! What agonies were being endured in that room,—agonies of which even he in his distress could have no idea! Would the husband, who was thus resigning the best part of himself, ever recover? Ah! such a wound could never close. The son was possessed by a feeling of intense compassion; for what was his loss compared with his father's? How

could that father live through the wretched solitude of his approaching old age, bereft of his other self, his gentle consoler?

General Treffenbach opened the door. "Come in, Magnus," he said, brokenly; "I would not rob you of these precious minutes. They are numbered."

CHAPTER II

MARIE LOUISE

THE day had dawned when the mortal remains of Frau Louise von Treffenbach were to be consigned to the Plattow family tomb.

Early in the morning, while the sun was rising like a fiery crimson ball above the moor, Magnus Treffenbach stood on the shore of the lake, gazing across it, and then walked slowly towards the forest, as if drawn thither by some invisible force. He had kept watch beside the coffin all night long, until the sun's first rays streamed into the silent flower-decked apartment, and then he had come hither to visit, for the last time before he bade that dear face farewell, the paths where as a boy he had so loved to walk with his mother. He recalled words spoken by her at each familiar spot, and he asked himself whether his life had been worthy of such a mother.

The lake lay before him, so placid that there was scarcely the sound of a ripple among the reeds. The rising sun tinged the tips of the long grasses crimson,

and on the expanse of the moor thousands of delicate gossamers were sparkling in its early rays.

Magnus stood on the breast of the dam, and thought of the legend of the king and the water-witch, which had often been told him also. Of all the legends and tales connected with the moor, none had made so deep an impression upon him as had the ancient story of the vanished palace; perhaps because the comprehension of this myth had required of him a greater effort of mind than had been needed for an appreciation of the ordinary fairy-tales of his childhood.

However that might be, this legend had fallen like a seed into the mind of the boy, and from it had sprung a positive horror of self-indulgence and deceit. Without clearly understanding why, the water-witch who had dragged the king down into eternal captivity had come to be identical in his mind with all that was frivolous and light-minded. Most women, and almost all amusements, he placed in this category. Living in the midst of social distractions, made keen in his judgment by daily contact with the world of 'society,' no one could more thoroughly despise the shallowness, the superficiality, the falsehood of a society life. The perpetual pursuit of amusement, the coxcombry of men of fashion, disgusted him, but he suffered in silence, because he had early learned to find interest and enjoyment in a very different manner of living,—in the world of science and of study.

His career as a student had been brilliant. Such examinations as his might well fill a father's heart with pride, and his Excellency exulted in his son. His university bestowed a doctor's diploma upon him in two branches of study. In addition to practical jurisprudence he interested himself in philosophy and

theology. This last impressed him with its vast importance; its study, he was convinced, must be pursued scientifically, and he was determined to do his duty in this respect.

His Excellency began to be afraid that his son would turn out a prig. To guard against so undesirable a result, he plunged him into the great world,—that is, he chose for him a diplomatic career. Treffenbach was easily persuaded to embrace it, since he knew that as attaché of the German embassy at St. Petersburg his time would be almost entirely at his own disposal. He published two or three very interesting brochures that established his reputation as a man of decided ability; he attracted the attention of his government, and there would be no difficulty in procuring him a high official appointment should he desire one.

“Yes,” he said to himself as he entered the forest and paced the path beneath the ancient firs,—“yes, mother, errors and mistakes I have often made, but I know of nothing in my life that I would hide from your pure gaze. I have honestly tried to do the right, and with *her* in your place beside me I shall never relax my efforts!”

The muffled tones of the church bell roused him from his reflections. The sound came wafted across the lake like a ghostly plaint of the captive king from his submerged palace.

Treffenbach retraced his steps with a heavy heart, for he knew to what the bell was summoning him. The darkest hour of the day was yet to come.

The funeral guests were numerous. The long railway journey, the rough country roads, had not discouraged those who were eager to pay the last token of

respect to the general's wife. The hall where the coffin stood was crowded with officers, and all the Plattow connection, which was extensive, was present.

In the church-yard, before the opened grating of the family tomb, Pastor Ehrhardt, in addition to the funeral service, spoke a few words that told of the saintly life of the dead, of her gentleness and unselfishness, her truth and nobility of character. There was much, indeed, that he could not tell: of how willingly she had sacrificed her health, which the whirl of city life had destroyed,—of how she had trained her son to feel that his father was in all things the noblest and most magnanimous of men,—of her calm acquiescence in her lot of mental isolation, never complaining, but always finding occasion for gratitude in her daily life,—of all this he could not speak; but there was enough to praise without it.

Treffenbach stood on one side, motionless, as in a dream, noting various trifles with exact observation, while his power to suffer seemed dulled. In his memory of this day a large part was borne by a tuft of nodding asters on a grave near by; they filled him with a vague wonder why the frail flowers had outlived what was so much more precious.

And then all was over, and the funeral train had departed without her whom they had brought hither. No one disturbed him as he lingered to superintend the locking of the heavy iron grating; then the men whose business this was also left, and he stood alone with the large rusty key in his hand, gazing at the scutcheon and inscriptions and at the bronze knight lying with folded hands on the stone at his feet.

Gone, gone from his life forever! He started, not because of this sad reflection, but because he seemed

suddenly to see her before him, there at the head of the broad stone before the tomb, clad in black, tall and slender as if ascended from the earth in renewed youth and wondrous beauty, arisen from darkness and death with the face she used to wear when, with a rose in her bosom, she led him by the hand. There she stood, with the waving golden hair wound like an antique crown about her small head, with the calm pure brow, the large blue eyes, the delicately modelled features, but cold and lifeless as a marble statue, as if, like a butterfly just emerged from the chrysalis into light and air, she had not yet wakened to perfect life. If the resemblance to the dead had not been so great, this apparition would merely have produced an impression of severe gravity and intellectual superiority; but as it was, it suggested the face of the departed, with all the loving ardour, which was its chief charm, vanished.

“Marie Louise,” he said at last.

She turned and offered him her hand. “Dear Magnus, you have my entire sympathy,” she said, frankly. “The noblest, the most unselfish of spirits has gone home. We all know what we have lost.”

He gazed into her eyes, and could not turn away his own. It seemed to him that she must be his,—his by an irreversible decree.

“I thank you for your words, Marie,” he said, “and still more for coming hither to-day to console me by your presence. It seems as if I had not wholly lost her while I see you before me.”

She returned his gaze without embarrassment. “It pleases me to hear you say so, Magnus. You ought to come to Ravenhorst now; it would do you good. You are looking very ill.”

"Yes, I should like to come. I have pleasant memories of my visits to you, of your grandmother's kindness, of the patriarchal life in the old house, of our studying together on the terrace, of the motto over your door, which you chose for your own when you were a girl of thirteen, 'With all thy might, Do thou the right.' See here, Marie." He took a heavy gold ring from his finger and handed it to her. She took it, and read the words engraved within it, 'With all thy might, Do thou the right.'

Thus they stood beside each other, death below them and blooming life around them. A slender branch of juniper drooping over the wall touched the girl's cheek caressingly as she handed the ring back. He hesitated to take it. "Why not keep it, Marie?"

"Why should I?" she asked, quietly. "I carry my motto in my heart. I have no need to wear it written in gold."

"I would not have the ring remind you of it, but of me."

"I think of you often. There is no need of such a memento."

"You do not think of me in the sense—— Can you not see, Marie, how hard it would be for me to go from you now, leaving you free, unbound, without a word to tell me that I am more to you than others? And you must know what was *her* last wish, what she would so gladly have lived to see."

Her cheek flushed slightly. "Oh, Magnus! to-day, —here and now!" she said, looking at him almost angrily.

"Precisely,—here and now! When I saw you standing there, it seemed to me that she must have

sent you,—a ray of light in darkness. Marie, I ask for no promise, no word that can fetter you: all I would know is whether I must resign all hope, or whether I may not at some future time tell you all that is in my heart."

She gazed thoughtfully at him. "I cannot, Magnus, reply at once to so important a question. I need not tell you—you know how highly I esteem you. I can look up to you, while I cannot but look down upon other young men. I know you my superior, and that gives me confidence in you. But before I give you an answer I must probe myself and reflect. The happiness of two lives is at stake. You know how ardently I desire to do my duty. One subject for grave consideration suggests itself immediately; it will doubtless be followed by many others. I never can consent to live in a whirl of society. You have likened me to your mother, but I think I am made of sterner stuff. She patiently acquiesced in her husband's requirements, although she found no satisfaction in the frivolous round of so-called duties which her position involved. I could never act contrary to my principles; and since I hold such a life a great wrong done to ourselves, to precious time, to our purest ideals, neither the fear nor the love of man could tempt me to consent to this wrong. My place is in Ravenhorst, and I shall never leave my old grandparents. I owe them this for their tender care of me. They need my youthful strength to help them to bear the burden of their years. Whoever marries me must be to them a son in the true sense of the word. Upon this condition only could I consent to marry. You see, I have spoken frankly; and now perhaps you would fain take time to consider. For you would

have to sacrifice much,—your ambition and your freedom."

There was a pause. Together they walked slowly across the church-yard. At last Magnus said, "If I hesitated a moment, it was because I thought first of my father. For myself, Marie,"—he took her hand and carried it to his lips,—"every word of yours finds an echo in my own soul. I would that even now all were as you would have it. I know no ambition save that which will lead me to do my best, wherever I may be. I shall go back now to St. Petersburg, but in six months I shall return to you to ask the happiness of my life at your hands."

CHAPTER III

IN THE SEASON

THE season was at its height. Every evening palaces and theatres, ball-rooms, and places of amusement of all ranks and descriptions in the German capital were brilliantly illuminated. Loud music resounded from the concert-halls, languishing waltzes from many a distinguished private mansion, in front of which carriages were standing in long files. The snow crackled, the air was as sharp as a keen knife, and in the canopy of night the stars flashed and sparkled as if shaking their golden heads at the behaviour of the mad world below, dancing and shouting and quaffing champagne, just at the time when the poor are suffering most, and which Christendom is supposed to

spend in calm meditation,—the time between the two great festivals of the church. “It is surely either thoughtlessness or a spirit of contradiction that leads us to turn night into day, and our winter into flowery spring.”

“Good heavens, Hess, you philosophize quite *à la* Treffenbach,” said a short, olive-complexioned Uhlan officer, as he walked beside a tall, distinguished-looking man in civilian’s dress along a brilliantly lighted street, casting a glance from time to time into the gorgeous shop-windows; “but I must confess I have not been paying much attention to your grumbling. I have been excusing myself to my stomach for the bad dinner I forced upon it at Reckau’s. It was abominable, was it not? Poor oysters and miserable champagne!”

“Don’t interrupt my profound reflections with such trivial stuff,” said the other, solemnly pulling at the long drooping moustache, which gave a certain air of melancholy to his face, quite belied by his ‘glance and voice. “I am not in the mood to be irritated by indigestible viands. Look at those starry skies, young man, and then talk of oysters! We never had a more brilliant winter’s evening in St. Petersburg, where we used on such a night to skate upon the illuminated Neva, and Treffenbach corrected my crude ideas with regard to pretty women by allusions to a certain Marie Louise von Plattow.”

The little lieutenant pretended to shiver. “Brr! Have you seen her?”

“Not yet. I’m tremendously curious. Is she handsome? Treffenbach said nothing about that. It was an entirely secondary consideration in his opinion. Ah, ye stars,—a secondary consideration!”

The lieutenant evidently found cause for self-gratulation in the fact that he had seen something which his companion had not.

"I saw her yesterday," he said, with an air of importance. "Handsome? Well, you know, Hess, in that respect I'm—a confoundedly severe critic."

Hess looked down sideways at the speaker with gentle contempt in his eyes.

"I know it, my dear Schlacken, and therefore beg you to honour me with your valuable verdict."

"Well, then,—handsome, yes, I suppose she is, but all ice."

"Where did you see her?"

"At President Bellwitz's. To be frank, it was for only a moment. You know Frau von Bellwitz is her cousin or something. I was calling there when she came in. They have been in town two days on account of an affection of old Herr von Plattow's eyes. He is, I believe, threatened with blindness, and is perhaps to undergo an operation. Fräulein Rhona explained it all to me, but I never can be made to understand relationships. But where is Treffenbach? I've not seen him since you came back from St. Petersburg."

"Studying in his rooms, I suppose, while I saunter about and look up old friends. Three years are an age. Little girls grow into ball-room belles in that time. The little Bellwitz must be very pretty."

"Charming!" Schlacken assented, his hand on his heart.

"Edmund, Edmund, that sounds quite sentimental. And how is my old friend the Princess Menardi?"

"Good heavens! where did you become acquainted with her?"

"I first knew her some years ago in Venice, where she was living in great splendour, and making a pet of La Beatrice, because, as she declared, an actress of so unsullied a reputation was more to be honoured than a Carmelite nun. What is she about here?"

"Ah, you must go there. Her evenings are most entertaining, but you must make up your mind to meet some very queer people. Not long ago an engineer of the Pacific Railway, who had heroically prevented a collision between two trains, figured in her drawing-rooms, and only last week she introduced a certain Augustus Stark, a carpenter, who had been lauded in all the papers for saving from drowning five men who broke through the ice. But here we are at the opera-house."

"True, I had quite forgotten where we were going. And so *she* is here. For how long?"

Schlacken shrugged his shoulders. "Who can tell for how long the management can contrive to secure her? They say she is fearfully exacting."

"The queens of art have a right to be so. *Allons!*"

They entered the vestibule. While Hess was looking for his ticket Schlacken stared through his eyeglass at the crowd that was besieging the ticket-office in hopes of finding places in the auditorium, although the ticket-seller continued to repeat courteously and distinctly, "All gone, gentlemen, all sold."

Hess paused before a mirror to arrange his cravat, and the glass reflected a head with close blond curls, bright keen eyes, and a genial expression. Unfortunately, the large drooping moustache concealed the good-humoured smile, and there were people who considered Count Armin von Hess a grave, melancholy man.

As they entered the brilliantly-lighted crowded house the overture had just ended with a loud crash. There was a pause of expectation; the curtain shook as if uncertain whether to rise; here and there some of the audience began to applaud, others joined in, and the noise grew louder every moment. When the curtain at last rose, it was amid a thunder of applause that seemed to shake the house to its foundations.

And she who was thus enthusiastically welcomed stood in the midst of fairy-like scenery like some magic flower of beauty, inclining her head and slightly smiling in acknowledgment of this greeting.

La Beatrice!

The fame of her beauty, of her genius, of her exquisite voice, and of her personal grace and charm had preceded her, but she exceeded all expectations.

Little Schlacken ruined his gloves in the ecstasy of his applause. But the first tone of that wondrous voice broke its way through the uproar, and in an instant the house was as silent as the grave. The rustle of a programme could have been plainly heard. Ladies leaned far beyond the front of their boxes to see more clearly, and every face expressed intense delight.

When the prima donna had finished, the storm broke forth afresh.

“Desperately fine!” Schlacken declared. “One could listen forever.”

“*Look* forever, you mean, you young hypocrite,” Hess rejoined. “Let us, between ourselves, confess that we know nothing of music. But her eyes,—her eyes!”

“As you please. Look, there are the Bellwitzes in their box; now you can see Fräulein Rhona! There is his Excellency von Treffenbach just opposite.”

"True," said Hess, leaning forward; "a magnificent figure of a man, and he looks well this evening, although they say that in consequence of—what was it?—increasing age, he is thinking of resigning."

"Not so loud, for heaven's sake, Armin," Schlacken whispered in great agitation.

Count Hess looked at him with a pitying smile.

"We know nothing of it yet," Schlacken insisted. "Why spread such reports? And there is Colonel Schlettau just in front of us! What if he should hear you?"

"Don't be uneasy; he is stone deaf."

"To hint that his Excellency could have declined from favour! Not a word of truth in it, I swear."

"Why feel yourself called upon to do that?" said Count Hess, good-humouredly. "But enough! *Revenons à nos moutons.*"

"La Beatrice would be greatly indebted to you if you mean by that to refer to her," Schlacken muttered, crossly.

"We'll not quarrel, my young cousin," said Hess, paternally. "I did not bring you up for that." And the good-natured little Schlacken smiled in spite of his vexation.

After the first act the two men went to pay their respects to the Bellwitzes. The father, who held a distinguished office under the government, was a little man, who concealed a somewhat commonplace capacity beneath a pompous manner. He left the conversation entirely to his stout, good-humoured wife. The daughter was one of the belles of the season,—a pretty little rosy brunette. She rattled on to Schlacken about balls, quadrilles on horseback, and the fine skating, and promised him a dozen dances within the next two

weeks, which he carefully jotted down in his notebook, asking her as he did so whether Fräulein von Plattow was going into society.

“My cousin? I doubt it. She calls balls and sleighing-parties the nonsense of childish fools.”

“What do you mean, Fräulein Bellwitz?” asked Count Hess.

“Just what I say. I merely quote her own words.”

“Rhona is quite afraid of her strict cousin,” the President’s wife said, with a laugh.

“How could I be otherwise? she is as learned as Magnus Treffenbach.”

“Oh, Count Hess, you are his friend and confidant, and can tell us whether Magnus Treffenbach is going to Brussels as Secretary of Legation.”

“I suppose so.”

“But my niece, Marie Louise, maintains that he is going to give up his diplomatic career and retire to his estates in the Margraviate. What could induce him to do so? With his intelligence, his force! They say the general, too,—it would be odd if both father and son——”

“Hush!” said the President. This, by the way, was the only word he had yet spoken, but it was an effective one. His wife instantly suppressed her love of gossip and began to talk of Wagner’s music.

When the curtain rose again the two gentlemen took their leave.

“That Count Hess is quite charming,” said Rhona, directing her opera-glass to the stage again; “so *comme il faut*, and so merry withal.”

“Yes, yes,” her mother replied, absently.

Meanwhile, the object of this admiration had separated from his younger companion, and leaving the

theatre, had gone to the nearest large hotel to sup. The dining-hall was brilliantly lighted, but almost empty. In one corner, however, there sat at a table three people, conversing in undertones. Hess occupied himself with the menu, and would hardly have noticed them had not the name of Treffenbach, repeated frequently, attracted his attention. Involuntarily he looked towards them. One of the two ladies sat with her back to him, and she was the principal speaker. The old gentleman and lady, who, in spite of their distinguished air, had an indescribable something about them that proclaimed them from the provinces, were for the most part listening.

"If that is the doctor's verdict," the speaker said, in clear sonorous tones, "there is nothing for us but to stay in town until March."

The old lady made some inaudible reply, and again the subdued but distinct voice spoke: "You are perfectly right, grandmamma. For your sake I will prove those wrong who think that I have not sufficient self-possession to face the world of society. For myself I care not what they say. I will go to those entertainments which I could not avoid except by pleading that I am still in mourning for Aunt Louise, which would be a prevarication to which I will not descend. The fact is that I laid aside my mourning a week before we resolved to take this journey. Now I am sorry that I did so, but it cannot be helped."

Again the old people made some remarks, that fell only as an indistinct murmur upon the Count's ear. She replied rather impatiently, "I shall never be great friends with Rhona. She is superficial and frivolous, with no higher interests than a ball. I grant that she

is one of the best of them, for she is good-humoured, and not at all envious nor given to deceit."

At this moment a gentleman entered the dining-hall, and, passing close to Hess, turned to speak to him.

"Ah, good-evening, Treffenbach," said the Count, springing up; "at last I see you."

"I want to ascertain the result of the first examination of my uncle's eyes."

"And then will you present me?"

"With pleasure. Come with me."

They walked across the room, and Count Hess found himself confronting the young lady whose face he had been so curious to see. She was seated in the full light of the gas-lamps. Her clear, well-opened eyes scanned him with a cool scrutiny to which, from a beautiful woman, the spoiled man of fashion was quite unaccustomed.

"Dear Marie," said Treffenbach, "this is my best friend."

"No more is needed," she said, and offered him her hand with calm dignity. Count Hess kissed the hand thus extended to him, an action which she seemed to find quite natural.

"His friend, his pupil, his shadow," the Count said; "I beg to be graciously regarded as such."

If there were irony in his words she did not perceive it. She was inclined to think the best of a friend of Magnus.

The conversation soon became general and very animated. Fräulein von Plattow talked well, and with a frankness that amused Hess intensely. She regarded any evasion, not to say any untruth, as a sin, and when opportunity offered made no secret of her views

with regard to the deceit and falsehood of 'society,' the silly talk of the young men, the levity of the women. On the other hand, she expressed enthusiastic approval of all that had been done lately for the relief of want and misery. Count Hess had never in his life talked as much about charitable institutions as he did upon this evening. But he could talk tolerably well about everything, and he considered this girl a very interesting study, being perfectly aware when and how to throw out a word of assent or dissent that would be sure to draw from her the expression of her opinion.

The Plattows had taken up their abode in this hotel, although the Bellwitzes had been pressing in their invitation to stay with them. Old Herr von Plattow's affection of the eyes and the treatment he was to undergo made entire repose necessary, and this it was impossible to have in the house of President von Bellwitz.

Count Hess insisted upon conducting the half-blind old man up-stairs to his rooms,—an act of courtesy which won the heart of Grandmamma von Plattow, and which was also acknowledged by Marie.

The two gentlemen then took their leave, and Hess accompanied his friend towards the Treffenbach mansion.

"What are your plans, Armin?" Treffenbach asked on the way, after they had walked along together in silence for a while, each occupied with his own thoughts.

"I am waiting for letters from my father, who is deliberating whether or not to allow his dear boy to follow the rather expensive profession of elegant idleness."

"What if I proposed you for the Brussels secretaryship?"

"What? you are not going to take it? You positively mean to retire?"

"In all probability."

"Treffenbach, you've been tremendously reticent with me of late. You tell me absolutely nothing, and yet you have the effrontery to present me as your 'best friend.'"

"To-morrow you shall hear everything."

"Very good. To-morrow I shall invade your study and carry you off for a long ride. I suppose his Excellency's horses are at your disposal. That dark brown mare is a beauty."

"Montrésor? She is my special property,—my mother's last gift to me. I had thought of taking her to Brussels. She has a very fine gait."

"Magnificent. Yesterday I saw——" Count Hess paused suddenly. "The deuce!" And he laughed. "It is slippery here. I was nearly down. But here we are in Wilhelms-strasse, and I must say good-night."

They shook hands, and he turned and retraced his steps alone.

A stream of carriages coming from the theatres rolled past him. Again in the gray light of dawn the same stream would pour through the streets when the lights in the ball-rooms were extinguished and the world had danced itself weary. Then the repose of night would first begin for these votaries of fashion.

Count Hess walked on, his hands in the pockets of his fur-lined overcoat, lost in thought. "'The nonsense of childish fools!' I think that was it. She is worth more than a broad farce. 'The nonsense of childish fools!'"

CHAPTER IV

STUDENT AND FRIEND

SINCE the death of its mistress nothing had been changed in the brilliant mansion of General von Trefenbach. In her drawing-rooms everything was just as she had left it. The folding-doors were wide open, and his Excellency daily frequented these rooms, filled with luxurious blue damask furniture and costly oil-paintings. Sometimes, in conversation with a friend, he would linger near the middle window, looking down into the street and resting his hand upon the pretty little work-table at which his wife had been wont to sit so constantly, her busy fingers completing hundreds of warm little garments, that vanished duly, —whither? No one knew, for no one asked. And whoever spent an hour beside her here was sure to depart richer in mind and heart.

The direction of the household was now given over entirely to Fräulein Emma. The Fräulein was a distant relative of the general's deceased wife. Her mother, a Von Plattow, had made a foolish marriage, which ended in destitution and misery. She had fallen in love at some watering-place with a 'Russian Count,' and had discovered too late that he was neither Russian nor Count, but a clerk in a large banking-house, who had been dismissed from his position on suspicion of embezzlement. He ran off with her dowry to America, leaving her to poverty and disgrace, which she did not long survive. Her child was a poor

little creature but scantily gifted by nature. No one would assume the care of her, least of all the Plattows, who could not forgive one of their name for throwing herself away upon a swindler. At last Frau von Treffenbach heard of this relative who was condemned to play Cinderella among strangers, and she sent for her, was impressed by her simplicity and gentle nature, and had kept her with her for twenty years. It was impossible now to imagine the household without her. Her small, slender figure, her sympathetic face, almost always swollen and framed in a black silk kerchief, was part and parcel of the whole. Although apparently yielding as wax, she knew admirably well how to preserve discipline and order among the servants. She understood that the elegance of an establishment depends far less upon the coat of the master than upon that of the footman. The trifling domestic duties which the general's wife had performed now fell to Fräulein Emma's lot; and as this fact was one that affected her deeply, the general for some weeks after his wife's death sipped his coffee and took his soup to an accompaniment of streaming tears from the Fräulein,—an infliction which, however, he bore with praiseworthy equanimity.

The worthy Fräulein's grief now had with it some admixture of joy, in once more having her dear young attaché beneath his father's roof. She could talk with him of the beloved old times, and could understand his emotion in being for the first time in these familiar rooms after their very soul had left them.

Baron Magnus had his own special rooms beneath this roof, and thus made his father's house really his home. His apartments were small, but just as he liked them. Adjoining his bedroom was a delightful

study,—the walls lined with book-shelves. The books upon his large writing-table were arranged by him in what to him was convenient order, but to the uninitiated chaotic confusion, and here he sat for days, blind and deaf to the world outside, never dreaming of what was said and discussed there.

“My dear boy,” said the general, entering this quiet sanctuary like a god of war in full panoply, all clank and glitter, “I must tear you from your studies, for I have contrived to have an hour free for you. Let us say a word with regard to your future. I am entirely satisfied with your choice, and have come to offer to pay my respects to the old people to-day and to bring affairs to a final settlement.”

Treffenbach had sprung up to offer his father a chair. “Thank you, sir,” he said; “I had intended to have matters definitively arranged to-day.”

The general sat down, and drummed a march upon the table. “You take the matter very coolly, my dear Magnus, almost too coolly. Confess, have you perhaps changed your mind in the course of the last six months?”

“I? With regard to Marie Louise?” Treffenbach asked in such unfeigned surprise that his father exclaimed,—

“All right! all right! I see that I was mistaken. Now for the next question. Are you or are you not going to Brussels?”

“I must inform you that it is my intention entirely to abandon a diplomatic career.” He spoke with some effort, for he knew that his father would dislike to hear this.

“Indeed? And instead?” the general asked, amazed. “I have inherited Velzin, and by my marriage come

into possession of Ravenhorst, an extensive and very carefully administered estate. Marie Louise wishes that I should relieve her grandparents of this care, and it is to my interest to become familiar betimes with my future occupation."

"But, my dear fellow, with the assistance of well-trained subordinates you could administer the affairs of Ravenhorst and live in Pekin if you chose! Is this your sole reason for abandoning a brilliant career?"

"I have no talent for diplomacy."

"Nonsense! you with your admirable capacity can do whatever you undertake."

"My dear father," Treffenbach said, after a little reflection, "our arguing this point can lead to nothing. I am resolved to marry Marie Louise, and she will be mine only upon this condition."

"Ah! that alters the case entirely."

"Can you blame her," Treffenbach calmly went on, "for not wishing to forsake her old grandparents, and for consenting to a marriage only upon condition that her husband shall be as a son to them, lightening for them the burden of existence? Is not this perfectly natural?"

"My dear boy," the general laughed, "the question is not whether I blame her or not. It is enough that she bestows her hand only at this price. You are in love with her, and are determined to win her hand. Here, my son, all discussion ends, all paternal authority and cold-blooded calculation cease. I shall not waste another word upon the subject; where love is lord, words are superfluous. This afternoon you shall have her consent, and so—*basta!*"

"I thank you for making matters so easy for me, sir."

"I resign myself to the inevitable," the general re-

plied, smiling, "but none the less do I mourn over your rejected laurels. You might have made a name for yourself."

"Perhaps," Treffenbach said, with some hesitation, "*this* will make me a better name than could have resulted from successful diplomacy." And he laid his slender white hand upon his manuscript.

"What have you here?" asked the general, taking up at random one after another of the books that were piled up on the table. "What? the Koran? Man, are you going to turn Turk? And the Talmud? And the Vedas? Humboldt, Plato, and Homer have vanished from your table. What does this mean?"

"That I am devoting my leisure to the pursuit of higher aims than the investigation of nature or of classical antiquity."

"Indeed; pray tell me what they are."

"I am collecting evidence that the Christian religion is not only the perfect revelation of Supreme Will, but the absolute truth, from which all other doctrines diverge like the rays of a star! All heathen religions are but attempts to discover God. In all the bloody ceremonials of savages there is evidently the attempt to reconcile a creator with a renegade creation. We have in Moses one of the greatest representatives of this doctrine. Nations have fallen to decay in vain strivings after this end, and from their ashes have sprung new races, attempting with novel ideas and novel wisdom to solve the eternal problem. You can easily imagine the intense interest that these studies have always had for me. I began them at the university. Step by step I have made my way through the gloom of centuries, here and there seeing a feeble ray of light, and always with fresh wonder at human

wisdom and human blindness. I have stood expectant before the closed doors of the mystery, whether in the temple of Isis or in Greek schools of philosophy, and when the doors opened I found only error, for with increase of knowledge what was believed to be a revelation of the Highest faded. Thus, slowly advancing, always testing, always comparing, I have come to the conviction that every thread of truth is gathered up in the Christian religion, that its founder is the personification of Divine truth; He is the reconciliation so long desired, the immortality so ardently hoped for! And now," the speaker concluded, after a pause, "I am comparing the ancient Jewish and Mohammedan writers, and proving from them the absolute truth of Him who is thought to be their greatest opponent."

While his son was speaking, his Excellency sat listening attentively; the smile of derision behind which ignorance so often takes shelter was not seen on his face. He was a man whose manifold interests and grave studies of all kinds had raised him to the lofty position which he occupied. Without being a learned man, except in his own profession of arms, the general had always taken pains to widen his stock of knowledge; he had read and thought much, and could understand the satisfaction felt by his son in his work, although such studies seemed to him nothing better than an intellectual amusement.

But he took care not to say so. Between the father and the son there existed that tender affection which avoids all offence; neither could endure the thought of hurting the other. The general's smile, therefore, had nothing of compassion in it, and he was soon engaged in an earnest discussion. Magnus was quite

prepared, for he liked to sharpen his wits in argument, and he argued with no one so eagerly as with this man, whose mental vigour he acknowledged. And the general was proud of his son's ready wit, his extensive acquirements. He sometimes grew angry, which his son never did. Magnus never lost the calm self-possession which his father reflected with a pang would have made him so distinguished a military man. While the two were enjoying their argument, a young man in riding-dress came up the broad entrance steps, rung, and stood tapping his high boots impatiently with his whip.

An orderly opened the door, and Friedrich appeared instantly at the sound of the visitor's voice. "'Tis the Herr Count!" he said, his broad, honest face beaming, for Friedrich was from Velzin, and was still an uncut diamond.

"Friedrich!" a reproachful voice called from the background; "what do you mean by running to meet gentlemen with your arm full of soiled napkins?"

"It is the Herr Count Hess," Friedrich stammered, in self-justification.

"Yes, here he is," the new-comer said gayly. "That ought to suffice; you are a little too strict with Friedrich!"

Fräulein Emma sighed audibly in the background.

"Pray show yourself, Fräulein Emma. Where in the world are you?"

"I really am not fit to be seen, Count; my face is too much swollen." And the crack in a side door grew narrower still.

"But, good heavens, how, then, am I ever to have the photograph you promised me three years ago?"

"Ah, Count, your joking ways remind me of the dear old times." And the poor Fräulein sobbed behind her door.

Hess went his way as if he were a son of the house. Treffenbach's rooms were separated by a long corridor from the rest of the mansion, and his visitor did not wait to be announced.

His entrance interrupted the warm debate. The general laughed, rose, and shook himself as if rather relieved.

"Yes, it is high time to stop, for this young fellow is playing the deuce with me." And his eyes sparkled with paternal pride. "How are you, Armin? Glad to see you."

"Thanks, your Excellency. I follow, as ever, with modest blushes, in the footsteps of my friend, as the moon waits upon the earth. It is the effect of a mysterious law of nature whose origin I leave him to investigate. I am now here to inform him that the snow is glittering and the sun is shining outside, and that it is a sin to sit poring over a study-table. I have borrowed a horse of my cousin Schlacken, and I want Magnus to ride with me."

"Bravo!" said the general. "That's what I call a true friend."

"Well, if it must be," Magnus said, resignedly, "I will order them to saddle Montré sor for me."

The general winced a little, but said, hastily, "I'll see to that, my boy. You must change your dress, which will take time."

He left the room, and Treffenbach locked his desk and made haste to don his riding-dress. Count Hess leaned against a window-frame, whistling a waltz.

"I come from your relatives," he broke off his

whistling to say. "It was rather early, but I made a pretext of inquiring the result of the doctor's visit to-day."

"A pretext? And your real reason?" Treffenbach asked, surprised.

"Well, in compliance with your persistent advice, I have instantly fallen in love with Fräulein von Plattow."

Magnus bit his lip. "I cannot remember giving you any such advice."

"But you always held her up to me as an ideal woman when I was so desperately in love with the fair Mascha. Man is but a broken reed; but I at least always try to profit by your sage utterances. I impressed it upon myself that a Marie Louise von Plattow was alone worthy to be loved. And now I have seen her, and I confess her to be an ideal,—an ideal of truthfulness. There is something in that nature which compels my veneration. If the world were so ordered that we were all forced to utter our thoughts aloud, what would become of you and me, for instance? With Fräulein von Plattow, on the contrary, such an arrangement would not make the slightest difference."

Magnus frowned. On the morrow there could be no talk of this kind.

"Have I your permission to woo her, Magnus?" his friend asked, in an insinuating tone, with a sidelong glance at him.

"No," said Treffenbach, curtly: "for I intend to do so myself."

"Just what I expected to hear," the other said, with exaggerated melancholy.

"Come, Armin, no nonsense. Let us go, and, as I

promised yesterday, I will tell you of my plans for the future."

They left the room, and Hess ran down the staircase two steps at a time, rattling his whip against the balustrade like any school-boy.

A gay throng of vehicles, horsemen, and pedestrians enlivened all the avenues in the Thiergarten. The bright winter sunshine had tempted every one out of doors. The frost glittered on the trees, and the snow crunched beneath the horses' hoofs.

"Ah! there is Treffenbach," exclaimed an officer on a prancing steed to Schlacken, riding beside him. "Hess has succeeded in getting him out. I must speak to him."

Treffenbach, who had just fulfilled his promise, looked grave and absent. His Excellency's son was greeted with great courtesy, Count Hess with warm cordiality. Little Schlacken asked a hundred questions, while his eyes glanced rapidly about him in search of food for gossip.

"There goes old Drachenstein with his pretty daughters, and there are the Hohnaus. Mamma Hohnau must have had a legacy, for the Fräuleins have brand-new sets of furs. Have you heard, Hess, that the Mettows have lost a heap of money? I warrant me Fräulein Jetta will not be so very fastidious now. That blond, pock-marked Adonis is Prince Savitzki, who has saved himself twice by marrying the daughter of his principal creditor."

"Schlacken is growing malicious," said Hess. "Tell me whether *she* is out to-day."

"Oh, certainly. In an open landau with a pair of grays. Very *chic!*"

"Hess, you have fallen in love again," said Schlacken's comrade.

"I know what good breeding requires," was the reply, given with dignity.

"Yes," Schlacken assented, "it is incumbent upon one, on my honour, if one would not be a thorough savage. The whole city is at her feet. I should be too if I were not under bonds elsewhere. But Hess is taking holiday."

"Thank your stars, Edmund, that I have a gentle spirit," Hess remarked with great solemnity.

"Of whom are you all talking?" Treffenbach asked, with a suspicious glance at his friend. The talk reminded him unpleasantly of the Count's confessions before they came out.

"They are talking of the Beatrice," Schlacken's comrade explained.

"Who is the Beatrice?"

"Ah ça, Treffenbach. I don't blame you," murmured Hess. "Excuse his ignorance, gentlemen; he stayed too long among the Esquimaux."

"There she comes!" said Schlacken, turning his horse aside.

A carriage rolled swiftly past, from which two ladies acknowledged the officers' bows. Nothing could be seen but fluttering veils and nodding ostrich plumes, but there was a sound of silvery laughter, clear and musical as if from the lips of a child.

"The beauty of a goddess," said Hess.

"A superb creature," Schlacken declared, with an oath. "Spanish or Algerian descent. So much race."

"I think you are mistaken," Treffenbach said, patting his mare's neck. "We bought her for full-blooded British."

"You are talking of the mare, and we of the lady,"

Hess said, "but your remark is accidentally correct. The Beatrice comes, they say, from Ireland."

So great was the respect that Treffenbach had contrived to inspire, that neither Schlacken nor Captain Schwertau dared to give vent to the laughter with which they were choking.

Treffenbach shrugged his shoulders. "It is, after all, much the same thing, I should think," he said, coldly. "Let us ride on."

"Unfortunately, we must turn back," said Herr von Schwertau, seizing upon the opportunity to indulge his merriment unrestrained.

Treffenbach gave his horse the spur and rode on. He was glad to be rid of the company of these 'idle coxcombs.' Count Hess accompanied him.

Once more the landau with the grays passed them, and once again that birdlike laugh resounded on the air.

At the moment, Treffenbach heeded it as little as he had done the talk of his companions. His thoughts lingered where he was happiest,—in his study. But in after-years, every thoughtless word just spoken arose sharp and distinct in his memory, and again he seemed to see the blue winter sky arching above him through the delicate tracery of leafless boughs, and again that low, careless laugh rang in his ear.

CHAPTER V

A BETROTHAL

THE Plattows' rooms at their hotel were very comfortable, and consisted of two drawing-rooms and the necessary number of sleeping-apartments. The drawing-room which belonged specially to Fräulein von Plattow was arranged by her own careful hand just as she liked it. Upon a writing-table near the window were ranged rows of books. A large work-basket stood on the table in front of the sofa. When all was finished, she stood still and looked around her with a scrutinizing gaze.

In a comfortable low arm-chair sat Rhona Bellwitz, her plump little figure clad in dark blue velvet, a soft hat resting upon her curls. From this post of observation she was watching her cousin curiously. "How many books you have, Marie Louise! Are you a blue-stocking?"

"You would probably call me one," the other replied, calmly, brushing the dust from the back of a chair with a little feather duster.

"Are many of them novels?"

"Take the trouble to read the titles; your eyes are good."

"I'm afraid of learned titles; they might give me the nightmare. What is your opinion of love, Marie Louise?"

"I think that sacred name is too often taken in vain. You do not know what you ask."

"How do you like Count Hess? Tremendously handsome, isn't he? I'll tell you a secret: little Schlacken is wild about me."

"I congratulate you; you will chatter each other to death."

"Oh, I don't mean to have him. I've no idea of that. My aims are higher. In fact, I must begin by telling you, cousin, that I am very much admired." And Rhona began to laugh. "Come to us this evening and you can see for yourself. I have at present five adorers, and I don't care in the least for any one of them. Won't you come? I beg you to, and you cannot refuse. It is mamma's birthday, and we are to have our most intimate friends; only the most intimate, I assure you. There is to be neither dancing nor cards; between ourselves, it will be horribly tedious, but I thought you would like that."

"When my grandparents come back from the doctor's I will give you my answer," said Marie, looking around the room once more. As she did so her glance fell upon a picture hanging on the wall above the sofa, a rococo pastoral scene; various fantastically-dressed couples were wandering about a brilliantly-coloured garden, and in the immediate foreground a shepherd had caught his coat upon a thorn while in the act of trying to kiss a roguish shepherdess in hiding behind a rose-bush. Marie frowned as she noticed this picture, and she rang the bell twice. A waiting-maid appeared.

"I wish that picture removed from my room," the lady said in a quiet tone of command. The girl looked first at the picture and then at the speaker, as if unable to comprehend.

"Do you not understand me? Send somebody who can take the picture down and carry it away."

"But why, my lady?" asked the maid.

"Because I desire it."

Before any further question could be asked, a voice was heard in the corridor, at the sound of which Rhona sprang up and ran to the door to listen.

"It really is his Excellency von Treffenbach, and he is asking for you,—only for you! Marie Louise, you begin to inspire me with awe! I am going. I would not for the world call down his Excellency's wrath upon me by interfering with this *tête-à-tête*. You know I have two brothers in his command, and the poor boys long for promotion. Between ourselves, however, his Excellency is not in such favour with the powers that be as he was, and no one can imagine why. Adieu!"

And Rhona slipped into the anteroom, followed by the maid, who had been meanwhile staring in utter bewilderment at the condemned picture.

The general entered in full uniform, festally, solemnly, and yet with a paternally benevolent smile that betrayed his errand. He kissed Marie's hand, and she calmly requested him to be seated, telling him that her grandparents were at the physician's, but that she expected them to return at any moment. Then she asked after Magnus.

"The poor fellow is at home in a terrible state of suspense," said the general. (In fact, Treffenbach's perfect composure had been exceedingly irritating to his father.) "For he is awaiting the decision that I am to bring him. Do you guess what I mean?"

"I understand you perfectly, general," she replied, "and I am grateful to Magnus for leaving me the time that I asked for reflection. Believe me, I have employed it conscientiously. I have examined myself

thoroughly, and have found that he possesses my entire confidence. I shall always look up to him, and I am proud to know that I have been chosen by him for his companion and helpmeet. Together we will strive after the highest good. But above all else do I rejoice that in him my grandparents will find a son who will smooth for them the declining path of life."

When she had finished she held out her hand to the general, who gazed curiously into the cold refined face, which was as an open page, wherein was to be read no embarrassment, none of the maidenly confusion, supposed to be natural under the circumstances. There were no changing lights in the blue eyes, which yet seemed created to mirror the changeful skies, no quiver of the rosy lips, but the face expressed a calm, self-conscious regard for duty, and the measurable degree of happiness that comes from the conviction of a lofty calling.

As the general rose to go, voices were heard in the antechamber, and Frau von Plattow entered, followed by her husband. A half-solemn, half-pathetic scene ensued, at the end of which his Excellency kissed his future daughter-in-law on the forehead, and then hurried away to carry to his son the tidings of his good fortune.

It was not long before Magnus made his appearance, not exactly jubilant, but with a very happy face. The old people received him with tears, which could not be good for Herr von Plattow's eyes. They called him son, and declared that they never could have so welcomed any other. Now Velzin and Ravenhorst could be united under the name of Treffenbach-Velzin.

Marie Louise stood by, smiling, waiting, as one does in receiving a friend, until it should be her turn. At last, after having repeatedly patted his cheek, Frau von Plattow released the young lover, and he turned to his love. What now? Should he kiss her? The indescribable chill that seemed to breathe from her whole personality was as far from inviting him to do so as was his own heart from any impulse to such demonstrative tenderness. He contented himself, therefore, with pressing her hands to his lips. Marie Louise seemed created for homage of this sort. Every man kissed her hand, and she saw in the act only a tribute of respectful courtesy which was her due. The lovers then took their place side by side on the sofa, and the shepherd and his roguish shepherdess above their heads might have learned from them how to behave themselves.

They talked together long and earnestly of their future life. They made plans for filling this life with work, convinced that together they could achieve important results. The period of betrothal, that poetic Elysium of usual lovers, appeared to them only a time of enforced idleness. Still, the marriage could not take place before the end of the year of mourning. "Although I know," said Treffenbach, "how gladly my mother would have seen her dearest wish thus fulfilled before her death."

"But it would not be fitting," Marie Louise said, calmly.

"You are right. I agree with you entirely, but I experience a kind of self-reproach when I say to myself that I might have given her this pleasure while she lived."

"How could you foresee that she was to be taken

from you so soon and so suddenly?" was the consolatory rejoinder.

As the general had declared himself in favour of a speedy announcement of the betrothal, it was arranged before Magnus took his leave that they should go to the gathering of intimate friends at President Bellwitz's, and that the announcement should be made there. Marie Louise had already made up her mind to join in some social entertainments. She was resolved to occupy the position that was hers of right, and to study to increase its influence, to battle for her convictions, to let her light shine, to do the duties that lay before her,—duties of charity, of warning, of resistance, if need be, and of a brilliant example. She was prepared to find life here hard, to be repaid by scorn and ingratitude for well-meant effort, and she saw in what was called society her natural enemy. But she felt that such a period of conflict was necessary to purify and strengthen her powers of mind. In the cloistral solitude of Ravenhorst it was easy to be true to her motto, but to be loyal to her strict principles in the great world, and, if necessary, to suffer martyrdom for her convictions, must be far more difficult!

And so they drove to the Bellwitz's. Herr von Plattow declined accompanying them in view of his state of health, and found entertainment at home in the visit of an early friend; but Grandmamma Plattow donned her richest violet silk, and crowned her calm, pale face and snowy hair with a wonderful cap, all ribbons and blond lace, and went with her granddaughter.

The President's rooms were brilliant with lights and flowers, and the stout, good-humoured hostess received

her birthday guests with genial smiles of welcome. Her husband, his chin freshly shaven, and a huge golden breloque dangling from the buttonhole of his snow-white waistcoat, looked as if he were cognizant of a piece of important political news,—the downfall of the French ministry at least,—but judged it prudent not to mention it. Fräulein Rhona, in dark crimson and camellias, flitted from group to group, laughing and exchanging small confidences with her intimate friends, whispering as if it were something astounding, “Marie Louise is coming.”

The intimate circle of the friends of the family, not reckoning the Bellwitzes and Plattows, assembled in honour of the birthday, consisted of about sixty persons, among whom Marie Louise presented herself upon the arm of General von Treffenbach, looking somewhat perplexed perhaps, but nowise daunted. Thus with head erect and deliberate step does a young stag first invade a tract of country new to him.

She was dressed entirely in white, which became her well. The intentional simplicity of her toilet was evident. She had followed her own taste, in no ignorance of what was usually worn. There is no disputing tastes. Flowers in the hair she despised. Her hair, in its glossy abundance, was indeed adornment sufficient. Whether this particular winter it ought to have been worn in braids wound about the head like a diadem was a question which might occupy others, but did not occur to her. She wore it so, and there were none who in their hearts thought it unbecoming, whatever they might find it their duty to say with regard to such a downright transgression of the prevailing fashion.

A large diamond cross hanging from a chain around

her neck was her only ornament, and this she wore at the request of Treffenbach, who had sent it to her an hour before.

Thus, 'a daughter of the gods, divinely tall, and most divinely fair,' she appeared among the guests, and wherever she turned they involuntarily made way for her. There were many young girls this evening who fell head over ears in love with Marie Louise von Plattow, as enthusiastic artists become enamoured of a marble statue.

His Excellency discharged with much majesty his duty of announcing the betrothal, and the President's satisfaction was unbounded in this revelation to all of the reason for his important air, and in being able to whisper in every one's ear, 'I knew it.'

The young couple received with great composure the good wishes and congratulations showered upon them. Fräulein Rhona counted up the various entertainments that would be given by intimate friends in honour of this betrothal, and promised Schlacken several fresh dances.

Count Hess was among the first to offer his congratulations, and was thanked by Marie with rather more condescension than she displayed to others. She naturally considered him as 'one of ourselves,' and that disposed her favourably towards him, while she scarcely vouchsafed a word in answer to Schlacken's fluent speech.

"Infernally haughty," Schlacken whispered to a comrade. "I thought Treffenbach great in that line, but she exceeds him. Just see them now! They look like a young prince and his spouse giving audience! She never even looked at me,—never looked at me!"

“Poor Marie; she is the only one to be pitied,” Fräulein Rhona murmured, as she flitted past him. “How could she be so self-denying as not to look at Lieutenant Schlaeken?”

“What was that?” the indignant lieutenant asked, turning hastily, but she was gone.

Meanwhile, General Treffenbach approached the pair. “My dear Marie,” he said, “I want to present you to the Princess Menardi.” And giving her his arm he led her to a divan, where sat a very diminutive lady with a sharp, orange-coloured face and very bright black eyes. Her person was bird-like in its tiny proportions; in her dress everything was large, and puffed in all directions. She wore a gorgeous gown of yellow silk, and on her head, surmounting all sorts of curls and puffs, two humming-birds vibrated upon slender wires. This merry little lady fidgeted and laughed shrilly as she persistently fanned herself. “Oh, my lovely young friend, I wish you every happiness. See how proud your father-in-law looks,—eh, your Excellency? And do you know that he has promised me the pleasure of seeing you at my house to-morrow? *une toute petite soirée?* You shall be entertained, that I promise you. Hey, Count Hess,—Conte Arminio! tell this young lady if it is ever dull at the old Princess’s.” And she tapped the Count on the arm with her fan.

He turned instantly: “What a question!” bowing, with his hand on his heart. “One always meets celebrities at the Princess Menardi’s. The loftiest and most distinguished of mankind may there be seen eating oysters and salad like other mortals. Whom did we have last? A missionary”—here he glanced towards Marie Louise—“who had been snapped up

by the savages ; his report was intensely interesting. I should not be surprised to hear that the incomparable Beatrice is to be there to-morrow evening, and bring her notes with her."

" You've guessed it!" the little lady exclaimed, in high glee. " I knew this charming person in Venice, and I said to myself, ' I'll try a little note. The Beatrice is the most good-natured creature in the world.' And I was right,—she accepted."

" We shall all owe the Princess many thanks for so charming an entertainment," Count Hess said, bowing. But General Treffenbach led his companion away.

" Is it incumbent upon us to go to that lady's soirée?" she asked.

" I do not see how it can be avoided," he replied, quietly ; adding, somewhat didactically, " Society is like a hydra. The more heads we cut off,—that is, the more social duties we discharge,—the more grow afresh. If it were your intention to have nothing to do with it, you should have told us, and your wish would have been our law. Now it is too late, and without incurring the reproach of discourtesy you cannot withdraw from a certain round of visits and entertainments, still less can you select from among them those congenial to you and ignore the rest. The Princess Menardi is, I admit, a very odd person in German eyes ; but what of that? She is of distinguished rank ; her husband was ambassador at several European courts ; she is a woman of mind and of influence ; she is, in short, one of us. Upon a nearer acquaintance you will find her extremely good-natured, universally benevolent, and quick to aid, where aid is needed."

" I admit the justice of what you say," she replied.

“No one shall reproach me with courtesy. I will do whatever you think necessary; only you must permit me to regard time thus spent as affording not pleasure, but discipline.”

CHAPTER VI

AN ACTRESS IN SOCIETY

COUNT HESS was quite sure that it would be useless to try to find his friend at home the next day; nevertheless he called upon the chance of seeing him, expecting to hear from Fräulein Emma that the happy lover had gone to carry his love the usual bouquet of violets. Instead of this, however, the Fräulein reported that the Herr Attaché had been studying since six in the morning; it really was not healthy.

In fact, Treffenbach had almost forgotten his betrothal, so absorbed was he in his work. When he looked up from it and was recalled for a moment to the present, the knowledge of his new relations was to him merely a happy consciousness, a calm delight, awakening neither impatience nor desire; nor was there any sense of neglect of chivalric duty, for Marie Louise knew where he was and what he was doing, and would have esteemed him less had he passed these precious morning hours in idle talk instead of in honest work.

So he went on thinking and writing, striving to elucidate the profoundest mysteries as if they were mathematical problems, until—

“Good heavens, Treffenbach! I could not believe

the gentle Emma, but here you actually are. Is it true, as slanderous tongues will have it, that Baron Magnus Treffenbach is at work upon a new translation of the Bible into German which shall prove our worthy Father Luther a mere bungler? The report seemed to me malicious, and I came here to be able to tell everybody that I had found nothing upon your neglected writing-table save a sonnet 'to Phyllis.' I pray you come with me."

"My dear friend, I have no time," Treffenbach said, impatiently.

Count Hess, a rose-bud in his buttonhole, his riding-whip under his arm, the personification of elegant ease, stood leaning against the writing-table, and now picked up the first book upon it that came to hand. "Well, let us see at least what makes such demands upon your precious time." And he began to read aloud: "Speculative Christian theology can derive as little advantage from this negativity as from the immediate relation of categories, according to the Platonic method, since the former cannot be separated from an hypothesis prevailing for centuries concerning dualism in the absolute (as primeval mind and primeval matter, which last Aristotle declared to be an immovable motor, but which Plato understood as a motor by its own force), and—" Count Hess paused, and cast a melancholy glance across the book at his friend.

"Go on," Treffenbach said, eagerly; "it soon grows very interesting."

"Take pity upon him, ye gods!" said the Count, letting the book drop: "he is losing his wits."

Treffenbach smiled. "I did not think that a few involved sentences could so puzzle you, Armin. Why

do you not study more? How are you spending your time here?"

"In lounging," Hess replied, with solemnity. "I am very sorry that my ignorance does not allow of my clothing this disgracefully naked fact in yards of inextricable tissue."

Magnus looked at him with grave anxiety. "Indeed, this is not well, Armin, especially for so energetic a temperament as yours. Take my advice. Adopt some occupation, some study—"

"Alone? Without you? It would have been easy in St. Petersburg, where we lodged together. But I have my worries, about which you seem to care little."

"Pray do not think me unsympathetic."

"My father has just written to me that my mother has devised a brilliant match for me. I am to go home to make the acquaintance of an heiress,—an amiable little chit of sixteen, who has not yet been out in society."

"Why an heiress?" Treffenbach asked, gravely.

"Can you not see why for yourself? Because I am no heir."

"Armin, do not sell your life, your pride, for money. If you are not in a condition to maintain a wife suitably, go to work to improve your affairs before you marry."

"Quite right. I will write to my father that I am not going home, but that I mean to stay here until I go to Brussels. And now may I say a word to you?"

"Certainly."

"You are very little with your father. Why do you not devote more time to him? He might at times almost forget the existence of a son, and that would not be well."

"At least not very flattering to me. But indeed your admonition is superfluous. You know how I respect and admire my father and enjoy intercourse with him. But at present that pleasure must be denied me. This work claims me. As soon, however, as the first part is ready for the press I will atone for my shortcomings."

Count Hess looked as if he would fain have indulged in further remonstrances, but he suppressed them and turned to go. "Well, I give up trying to lure you forth to-day. Do not forget the old Princess's *soirée* this evening. You ought in courtesy to call there before it, but she is very forgiving in such matters."

He left the room, and Magnus picked up the ponderous tome that had fallen under the table, sighed, and applied himself afresh to his work.

At the appointed hour he drove with his father to the Princess Menardi's. His Excellency was in the best of spirits, and twitted his son with being converted to frivolity by Marie Louise.

The rooms of the popular old Princess were sure to be crowded, for she scattered her cards of invitation with lavish hospitality, and at the last moment invited every one whom she chanced to meet. She was fond of patronizing unappreciated genius, or people who had suffered for their convictions,—what those convictions might be she never troubled herself to inquire.

Treffenbach made his way through the throng until he encountered Rhona Bellwitz, and could ask where Marie Louise was, or whether she had decided not to come at all.

"Oh, she came with us, of course; but where can she be? She was talking with old Frau von Schweidnitz, and went with her into that room. I am now

looking about for Moors or Tartars, but I have seen nothing extraordinary."

"Why, the Beatrice is in there; surely that is enough," a pretty young married woman observed, gayly. "Ah, good-evening, Baron Treffenbach; how noble of you to come here to us, when all the other men are crowding into the room where the beautiful Beatrice is."

"An actress here?" Treffenbach asked, in a tone in which there was a fine admixture of surprise, disapproval, and annoyance.

"As you see,—the Princess is introducing her into society." She gazed curiously into his face, then laughed and turned away.

He too walked on. It was annoying that Rhona should have told him that his betrothed had gone into that room. He felt a strong desire to take her out of it as soon as possible, and he tried to get to her. But this was no easy task, for the entire assemblage seemed thronging in the same direction. At last he found himself in a small room hung with yellow damask, glittering like a topaz in the light of a large chandelier. It was filled with ladies and gentlemen, all pressing about a centre of interest, and all apparently bent upon being especially amiable.

In the middle of the room was a round divan with a yellow silken obelisk in its centre. Seated on the down cushion, her head leaning against this support, was an exquisitely beautiful woman, whose large dark eyes were like stars of fire. Her perfectly modelled neck and shoulders gleamed snowy white above the dark crimson of her satin bodice. She wore a necklace of pearls, and single pearls were scattered like heavy drops of silver here and there in her braided

hair, the arrangement of which gave a striking air of distinction to the finely-shaped head.

At the moment when Treffenbach perceived her she was saying in a gentle voice to the Princess Menardi, sitting beside her, "Caprices? Ah ça! I never have caprices. Ask any impresario in Europe. I am ready to keep my promise at any moment!"

"Peppino!" the old Princess called in her gay shrill tones, "La Beatrice is going to be so kind as to sing to us. Peppino!"

At the call there appeared, not a lap-dog, but a tall, stout young fellow, with an olive complexion, a rather fat face, and a close-cut black beard. This was Prince Joseph Menardi, the son of the old Princess, and a very good fellow; but Treffenbach could not know this, for he did not remember ever seeing him before. He was inclined to believe him the *buffo* of some Italian opera company, and his indignation was great.

After the son of the house had led the singer to the piano, Treffenbach had the satisfaction of discovering that Marie Louise was not in this room. As he turned towards the door he started. Amid the hubbub of voices he heard again that silvery laugh which had so unaccountably rung in his ears since yesterday. He paused to listen, and then and thero sank into a strange dreamy revery, in which he was a small boy once more, and was chasing a little blue butterfly over the Velzin moor, tumbling through the sand and over the roots of the fir-trees, now shouting for joy, now swallowing salt, impatient tears, and still the little blue butterfly eluded him and fluttered on and on into the dim distance!

The voice of his friend Hess close beside him aroused him from his dream. "The child is bewitching. I

only fear that the public will soon turn her head. Without seeing her, only to hear her laugh is a greater musical delight to my ear than any I gain from a finely-sung aria."

"Yes," Treffenbach replied mechanically, without the slightest idea of whom his friend was speaking.

"I am tremendously curious to see her," said the voice of Rhona Bellwitz. "Is she really here? A perfect fairy, they say. Is it true?"

"A very fairy,—she is but fifteen."

"Oh, a mere child!" And Rhona turned away disappointed.

Meanwhile, Treffenbach had collected himself sufficiently to ask, "Of whom are you talking?"

"Of Violetta Fouquet."

Meanwhile, in the quietest corner, Marie Louise was eating an ice and discussing 'the evils of the age' with an old Consistorial-rath.

CHAPTER VII

VIOLETTA FOUCHE

"OPERA or ballet?"

Madame Beatrice Fouquet spoke these words with a thoughtful nod of her beautiful head, unfolding as she did so a fan of peacock's feathers, with which she wafted towards her the fragrance of a huge bouquet of violets in an Indian bowl that stood on a table beside her divan.

She reclined there with the haughty grace of a

princess in an Eastern fairy-tale; her head, resting on her hand, was circled by the classic band of gold, the long dark fringe of her eyelashes showed against her soft cheek as, with downcast eyes, she seemed to be seeking an answer to her question in the intricate pattern of the Turkey carpet. "Opera or ballet?"

At the window of the richly-furnished apartment sat a lady, erect and stiff, busied with some crochet-work. Beside the divan, upon a piano-stool, was seated a very boyish, unpretending, fair-complexioned man, who, out of respect or timidity, occupied only half of the seat. He sighed from time to time, but did not speak. His look at times rested upon the countenance of the lovely lady on the divan with what was admiration bordering on adoration. Indeed she was beautiful, and radiant with life and gayety. No wonder. She was aware that at this moment the imperial capital was at her feet, that in the course of the past week she had reaped more laurels than fall to the lot of many a man of high descent during a lifetime. There lay her last trophy in proud humility upon a yellow silk cushion. Tom, the gaudy parrot, had left his gilded perch to pay his respects to the wreath, and was pecking at the firm shining leaves, while Charlie, Madame's pet lap-dog, was tearing at the fluttering ribbons that bound it as they hung down upon the floor.

"Pray chase those creatures away, Contelli," the Fouquet exclaimed, irritably.

The little man hastened to do her behest. Charlie crept snarling under a sofa, Tom fluttered angrily back to his perch, where he performed several gymnastic feats, and shrieked loudly, 'Opera or ballet?'

Whereat Madame Fouquet, like an April day, began to laugh, her white teeth shining between her rosy lips. "There's some sense in the screaming creature. Come, Tonino, tell me what you think."

"It is a difficult matter to decide," he murmured.

"It is well that it is not for you to decide it," she said, drawing up beneath the hem of her morning-gown her little feet shod with gold-embroidered slippers. "All I ask you is, What do you think of her voice? Does she improve? In a word, do you think she can take first rank as a singer?"

"Ah, ah! *Che dire?* The Signorina has a charming voice——"

"Enough, my friend. A charming voice is a tolerable voice, and a tolerable voice is worse than none at all! The world shall never say that Beatrice Fouquet's daughter is a tolerable singer."

"Ah, Signora, I fear——"

"Indeed, I always thought so!" Madame said, with an air of satisfaction. "Violetta begged so for singing-lessons that I let her take them of you. But I have never heard her sing so as to impress me with the idea that a brilliant future lay before her. Tolerable, I always said to myself, pretty, sweet, but—in-significant. Charming in a drawing-room, nothing on the stage. On the other hand, it is only necessary to see her cross a room to be sure of what is her true vocation. There is no doubt,—there need be no hesitation,—it is as clear as daylight! I am sorry to give up the singing-lessons, for you have taken so much pains, my good Tonino; but Violetta must henceforth pay more attention to her dancing-lessons. She has the capacity, but not the training; she must appear in public frequently, to conquer her timidity. *Au revoir,*

my dear Contelli. When you write to your mother give her my love."

Contelli arose hastily, bowed, and left the room.

Then there was silence, except for Tom, who rattled his chain and now and then uttered a short shrill scream. The stiff old lady at the window went on with her work without raising her head. She might have been an automaton.

Madame leaned her head upon her hand and yawned slightly. Then she picked up a hand-glass, and carefully examined her face in it. When she was alone and not speaking, when she allowed herself to be entirely at rest, she looked older, but she was always beautiful. Smoothing aside a rebellious curl, she shook her head thoughtfully. "I am growing old," she said; "it is time I married."

The gray lady at the window did not stir at the utterance of this original remark; she did not even look round.

"Madame Morton," said the Fouquet.

A long face turned towards her. "What does Madame wish?"

"Pray be so kind as to call *Violetta*."

Madame Morton left the room. Her figure was tall and bony; she always wore rustling gray gowns, with her hair in large gray puffs beneath a majestic cap of gray and white tulle. She was, as her employer was wont to declare, a priceless treasure,—one who wore virtue and respectability stamped upon her brow, the very model of a 'companion.'

Madame Beatrice had never succeeded in discovering whether Madame Morton could think or feel. No one had ever heard her express an independent opinion, or had seen her at all excited, not even *Violetta*,

who was daily instructed by her in literature and other advanced studies and was held to be a favourite with her.

She was well born, and might indeed have wondered at the caprice of fate that had raised a Beatrice Fouquet to the crimson divan, and that had made herself, the grand-daughter of a minister of state, the servant of this creature who had formerly, as every one knew, run barefooted along the roads in Ireland, only too glad to beg a sixpence in exchange for a bunch of wild flowers and a song.

But she never hinted at any such thoughts, or expressed indignation even by a look.

In five minutes she re-entered the room, took her seat with dignity, and began to crochet again, saying, "Fräulein, Violetta will be here presently."

"Thanks," said the Fouquet, without looking up from the book she was reading.

Soon the door opened gently, and a creature dressed in white came flying across the room with a foot-fall so light as to be inaudible. As she flitted past the bowl of violets this sylph buried her face for an instant among the fragrant mass, then stooped over the singer's hand and took her seat on a low ottoman beside the divan. "Here I am, mamma," she said in Italian.

"I only wanted to tell you that I have stopped your singing-lessons with Contelli; it is labour in vain. You must take more lessons with the ballet-master."

The girl's lovely face flushed slightly. "I like to dance," she said, with a little sigh, "but—but—"

"But what?"

"Ah, you know what, mamma!"

"Nonsense, Violetta! You must conquer your fool-

ish timidity. The public will think it affectation, for you are anything but timid in society."

"Ah, there is no public to confront there."

"Don't be so childish. There are the very same people who look at you from their boxes in the evening."

"But, oh, mamma, it is not at all the same thing. There are no lights, and no music, and no opera-glasses,—I hate opera-glasses,—and they all sit there so still, so still, and stare at you, and never speak,—hundreds, thousands of heads, and all kinds of colours, and with eyes, and glasses in their hands, and you—you must keep quiet, and, whether you turn red or pale, you dare not turn away, you must bear it all,—distress and terror,—and you must swallow down your tears; and although you long to sink into the earth, you must dance and spring about. Ah!"

Madame Fouquet must have been accustomed to such outbreaks, for she only shrugged her shoulders.

"Now, in a drawing-room or riding in the Tiergarten," Violetta went on eagerly, "what is there to be afraid of? No one looks at me as if they meant to devour me. They are all kind, and talk and laugh, and I can say what I choose, and laugh as much as I like, and can go or stay as I please. Don't you see, mamma?"

"I see that you must take more pains to overcome your timidity, for it must be done. True, I might say, 'Very well! my circumstances are such as to allow me to educate my daughter as I please. I will train her up for private life. I will marry her to a count, and she shall be a charming countess.' But I am not so egotistic, so short-sighted. You possess a talent which will exalt you above your fellows. Learn

to use the wings that have been given you, and you can make yourself an immortal name; you can see the world at your feet. Would it not be a pity—yes, a sin—to throw away these laurels? As for marrying a count, there is time enough for that”—she smiled—“when one is as old—as mamma.”

There was a pause. Violetta looked as if she were taking it all into consideration.

“At all events,” her mother said at last, “you will accept the kind offer of the manager to afford you an opportunity shortly of appearing in a fairy pantomime as an elf in a flower.”

“I can play a sleeping elf, certainly.”

“You will be good and do whatever is required of you. And now go, child, and ring for Carolina. It is time to dress.”

Violetta arose, kissed a curl of her mother’s raven hair which had escaped from the gold band, and left the room, carelessly humming a French song.

For Violetta Fouquet was as happy and gay as a bird that trills its song without thinking why. Living only in the present, shielded by her mother from all annoyance, she knew nothing of the dark side of the sphere of life in which she had been born,—she saw only the brilliant exterior of this gay existence. She had experienced nothing but kindness and good will ever since she could remember, since she had first opened her violet eyes upon the world where she had been greeted with the clinking of champagne-glasses. For Albert Fouquet, the light-hearted tenor of La Seala at Milan, had celebrated his daughter’s birth by a champagne-supper, at which he declared that the child’s name was written in her eyes, and that she should be called Violetta.

He had been a good, kind, innocent fool,—Albert Fouquet! It was thus that his widow still characterized him in her memory. Champagne had been his elixir of life, and he had died of heart-disease on the stage, a champagne-glass in his hand, leaving a widow but eighteen years old, with an infant of but a few months.

From Violetta's point of view this was a world where every one was good and kind. Why, even the cross old prompter smiled and nodded kindly at her whenever she appeared upon the stage. Why was he so good to her and so cross to every one else? She did not know. She never knew the power that lay in her sparkling eyes, in her look of innocent trust that disarmed all malice and shamed all violence. In happy unconsciousness she had lived hitherto like the flowers, like the butterflies in the sunshine. She had known no wish unfulfilled, her loving spirit had never suffered a repulse, her gayety had never been misunderstood.

She had been accustomed from infancy to the public's adoration of her mother. From her earliest childhood she had been used to the frank speech and manners of the world in which she lived. She had been taught that her instinctive aversion to the stage was a fault which she must try to amend, and she sincerely hoped to be able to do so. Madame Fouquet lodged in a very fine suite of rooms in the same hotel in which the Plattows were established. As was the case with Marie Louise, Beatrice Fouquet had given a characteristic colouring to her room. She had not placed her furniture squarely against the wall, but chairs and tables were scattered here and there in artistic confusion, and in lieu of well-bound,

useful books there were graceful vases and bowls filled with flowers.

Violetta's room was in the back of the hotel, opposite her mother's apartments, and looked out upon a narrow street, while the drawing-room windows opened upon one of the widest and most frequented thoroughfares of the capital. Nevertheless, Violetta was very fond of her small domain, and liked to retire thither alone and give herself up to reflection when wearied with Carolina's chatter and Madame Morton's taciturnity.

At twelve o'clock Madame Fouquet generally drove out with her daughter. This was always refreshing; the air here was so wonderfully clear and cold, and everything in the streets was so different from what they had seen in Italy or France, that Beatrice as well as her young daughter was always entertained. The Fouquet often invited her 'companion' to accompany them. Madame Morton was then enthroned beside her in mute but ostentatious respectability, and there was an air of great dignity imparted to the whole group. Violetta often begged that she might have her own little pony-wagon, which she always had in Milan, drawn by a pair of the tiniest Shetland ponies in blue and silver harness. But her mother declared that it looked too frivolously gay, not sufficiently distinguished, and that she had reasons for wishing to avoid such a display. So the elegant landau rolled noiselessly along, and the sunshine and blue sky tempted all the world forth to celebrate the triumph of gorgeous toilets and full-blooded English racers, while seeming only to enjoy the lovely weather.

Soon after their return home dinner was served, at

which guests were never lacking, for Madame Fouquet had many friends of both sexes among the members of her profession, and her hospitality was princely. It is true that she always exacted the courtesy shown to one whose endowments placed her far above all possibility of envy and jealousy. And as the charm of her manner and beauty was very great, she usually was granted all that she claimed. The management as well as her fellow-artists were well inclined to do all in their power for this guest, and there was no end to the dinners, suppers, and entertainments given in her honour, for they hoped to induce her to remain with them, cost what it might. But she skilfully evaded all proposals and engagements, although she seemed to have no desire to leave the city, but continued to enrapture the public nightly either as Elsa, Regia, Norma, Leonore, or Valentin, speaking perfectly various tongues and trained to a high degree of artistic perfection in all respects. Her voice accommodated itself to Wagner's music as well as to Rossini's, and in contrast to her daughter, the stage was her home, where her many-sided nature found free play.

Antonio Contelli had his place below the salt at Madame Fouquet's table. At home the shy youth was valued as an admirable tenor, but he was taking holiday at present, and Madame Fouquet, who felt herself under certain obligations to his parents, had offered him a temporary position as her secretary. He was as devoted as Fridolin, and contented with any treatment. To adore Madame at a distance, and to obey every word and look of Violetta's, was all the enjoyment that he required of life.

When the dinner-guests departed, Violetta would throw herself on a lounge in a bewitching state of

exhaustion, nestle her dark, curly head among the pillows, and take up some book of poems, for she delighted in poems, and thought Tonino Contelli's verses charming,—a fact which incited the devoted young fellow to fill whole volumes with delicate stanzas. 'They put one to sleep so deliciously,' the sylph would remark, with unconscious malice.

Madame Fouquet, too, was wont to rest after dinner until the time came to go to the opera. Sometimes Violetta accompanied her mother. She liked to do so, for the girl had friends everywhere, whose weal and woe were very near her heart. A thorough coward before the curtain, she was a heroine in courage behind the scenes, whenever sympathy was needed or a word of blame was required. Familiar with the theatre from early childhood, and endowed with quick sensibilities and a warm heart, she was far more deeply interested in the people who occupied subordinate positions—those who attended to the mechanical part of the nightly display—than in the actors. The latter played, the others worked. There were the workmen, the machinists, the mechanics, the servants, the box-openers, who laboured diligently unseen and uncared for, receiving but paltry wages, and reaping no thanks, to say nothing of applause.

As there was for Violetta but one theatre, *the theatre*, she was at home everywhere in every temple of her mother's art, and found the same types repeated everywhere. Thus, upon this evening she told her mother, with eager, ever-ready sympathy, "Only think, mamma, the box-opener in the second tier has six children, and he has just broken his leg."

"Ah, Violetta!"

"And he only recovered from the varioloid last November."

"The man in Florence had the varioloid too!" Beatrice rejoined, irritably. "Do stop your eternal chatter about these people, Violetta."

"But, mamma, I really have something——" And, interrupting herself, she ran off, to return shortly, leading by the hand a little old gentleman, who found some difficulty in following her light footsteps.

"He says, mamma," she exclaimed, breathless, "the Herr Musikdirektor says that my voice is an unappreciated jewel. Was not that it? Ah, Herr Musikdirektor, pray speak!"

"*Pardon*, my dear Herr Buchwald," said Beatrice, before the old man could say a word; "there are third- and fourth-rate jewels. You probably mean a rock-crystal."

"Excuse me, madame, I mean a diamond. Contelli"—he smiled ironically—"is hardly the one to perfect it."

"The first tenor of our opera, Herr Direktor," the Fouquet rejoined in a haughty tone; "allow us some capacity to judge, I pray."

Another man, Violetta's dancing-master, at this instant made his appearance. "No, no," he said. "The child must remain faithful to the ballet. All doubtful talent must give place to that which is indubitable. There was once a Taglioni, but Violetta Fouquet will eclipse her."

"Bravo!" Beatrice laughed. "Precisely my opinion."

CHAPTER VIII

SIR GEORGE O'HALLORAN

"IT is very hard," Violetta murmured the next morning early, as she sat in her dressing-gown waiting for Carolina to bring her her breakfast; and as she leaned back in her arm-chair the tears glittered in her eyes, and she sighed profoundly.

Sighs and tears were both called forth by the memory of the previous evening. How could she ever submit to the ordeal of that horrible public? Life began to wear a cloudy aspect to the eyes which had hitherto seen only clear skies above them. But she forgot her gloomy reflections when Carolina appeared with the tray that held her dainty repast,—a steaming cup of chocolate and a basket of tempting sugar-cakes. When the maid left the room, Violetta sipped her chocolate leisurely and ate one of the cakes, then going to the window she lightly drummed on the glass, and stood expectant, looking down into the narrow, dim street. Tall houses of gloomy aspect seemed to turn their backs upon it in disdain. The noise and hubbub of the wider, more frequented thoroughfares floated hither muffled by distance, and the dwellers there below could see but a narrow strip of blue sky above their heads. And yet, strangely enough, the life led in this narrow street interested Violetta far more than the hurry and bustle of the principal streets and squares. This was not the first time that she had stood looking down to see what

was going on below. Little children were always at play there with tops and marbles, and they almost all looked pale and sickly. Violetta had once seen a cross-looking woman come out of the cellar where she lived and give one of the children a crust of bread. A little girl standing by had nothing, and she sat down on a step and cried bitterly. Madame Fouquet's daughter instantly was inspired by a happy thought. Beside her was a basket of sugar-cakes. She ran for a ball of worsted from her work-basket, tied one end of it to a cake, and lowered it down in front of the very eyes of the amazed child.

Since that day the same thing had been done every morning, and the only wonder was that it had not resulted in a severe cold for the young benefactress. Gradually between the youngest dwellers in the narrow street and the 'pretty lady' overhead an understanding was established by means of signs that left nothing to be desired in the way of an unwritten language. As soon as Violetta tapped upon the window a band marshalled itself below, and gave her to understand by unmistakable gestures that all the bigger brothers and sisters, whose rapacity and superior strength were to be feared, had marched off to school. Every face broadened into a smile, and the eyes directed to the upper story sparkled as they watched the descent of so many delicious morsels. Ah, this was a 'public' after Violetta's own heart.

The cakes were scarcely gone when Carolina reappeared to dress her young mistress's hair, and Madame Morton entered to say that Madame Fouquet wished to see her daughter immediately.

Violetta flew to the drawing-room, but had no sooner opened the door than she paused in dismay,

for, oh, heavens! there sat an elderly, smooth-shaven gentleman, the sight of whom recalled all her distress of the previous evening. He now settled his spectacles on his nose, and examined her with the air of a gardener hesitating whether or not to purchase a new species of rose for his parterre.

“Come, Violetta,” said Madame Beatrice, “and thank Herr Steinach. He will allow you to take part in the fairy pantomime next Tuesday.”

“He is very kind,” the girl said obediently, but with a little sigh; “only I am so very stupid.”

She looked so lovely in her confusion that, as Herr Steinach rose to go, he said, with a smile, “We are quite ready to forgive some awkwardness in so young an artist.”

When he had gone, Madame Fouquet said calmly, “That is settled, then. Why are you in your morning-dress so late, Violetta? Tell Carolina to put on your gray suit. I want you to call with me upon the Princess Menardi.”

“Ah,” said Violetta, in a melancholy tone, “that too, mamma? Do you like her? She is so very yellow.”

Beatrice laughed. “She is the golden key to the most aristocratic drawing-rooms in town. Such a one is not easy to find. Do not stand there looking so foolish, my child. What is it?” The last three words were spoken to a servant, who handed her a card.

‘George,’ Violetta read over her mother’s shoulder. The card was written in pencil.

‘George!’ screamed the parrot, ruffling his feathers.

“Where is he?” exclaimed Madame Fouquet, eagerly. “Why does he not come up?”

"Madame," the servant stammered, "has ordered the carriage."

"Idiot!" Beatrice exclaimed, stamping her foot. "Run after him; bring him up from the street if need be."

"No need, madame; here I am. I am not so easily turned away."

At the open door stood a man who, once seen, was not easily forgotten. An Adonis? An Apollo? Good heavens, no! Rather a Cyclops, on leave of absence from Father Vulcan.

And yet there were people who maintained that Sir George O'Halloran was a handsome man.

He was scarcely an elegant figure for a fashionable drawing-room. Short, broad, muscularly built, his rough coat and leather leggings suggested an English squire, which suggestion was contradicted, however, by a crimson kerchief artistically knotted about his throat, and a soft black felt Rembrandt hat, which gave him rather a thetic air. His head, which reminded one of the busts of Beethoven, was carried high, and the black eyes in the tanned face seemed positively to burn with the intense fire of their glance. His thick, bushy hair was sprinkled with gray, and lay in disordered, tangled masses above his broad forehead. If he would have kept quiet, one would have found—with surprise, perhaps—the impress of manly beauty and force on his strongly-marked countenance, but he was never quiet. His features were always in motion, the oddest changes of expression flashed across them continually, like lightning over a rugged landscape, lending them at times a grotesqueness, heightened by the tanned and wrinkled texture of his skin.

Swift as a deer Beatrice ran to this man as he stood broad, sturdy, and frowning, her face beaming with delight. She buried her white hands in his shock of hair, drew the unlovely head down to her lips and kissed it on the forehead. Then, before he could prevent her, she stooped, took his hand, and imprinted a kiss upon that also.

“Dear old friend!” she exclaimed.

“Nonsense!” he cried, both touched and vexed. “Would you make me out a Methuselah, madame? Come, come, let’s have a look at you! And that is little Violetta? Little? Confound it! the butterfly has burst the chrysalis, and that’s the truth. Well? The chit does not know me. Is this the way you keep your vows, Miss Humming-bird? Who promised seven years ago, by all that was sacred, to be my wife?”

Violetta was startled at first, and then, with an irresistible impulse to laugh, turned and ran out of the room.

“Brava!” he said. “My attempt at enlightenment is hardly successful, eh? You’re a little frightened too, Beatrice?”

“I frightened? And at you? Ah!”

“Well, then, tell me what you have been doing for these seven years.”

“Yes, seven years, sir!” she said, reproachfully. “What have you been doing all this time?”

“Most of it playing the hermit in G——. I have composed several new operas, which I trust you will make popular.”

“Excuse me, no! I have not forgotten the representation of your first opera, ‘Der Flederfittich,’ when the audience in the little theatre kept calling out ‘false! false!’ ”

"Nonsense!" he growled. "Why false?"

"Because it was not exactly Strauss's 'Fledermaus.'"

"That's all your fancy, Beatrice," he said, wrinkling his forehead, while he smiled good-humouredly. "You are positively the most malicious woman in the world."

"And yet," she added, gently, and her eyes filled with tears, "it seems to me as if I had heard no real music since I last heard you."

"Ah, flatterer. Now tell me all about yourself."

She did so with a conscientious exactitude quite foreign to her mercurial temperament. And in turn he unrolled before her the picture of a strange existence, that of a man who had turned his back upon the rank of life to which he was entitled by wealth and birth, and who had found his friends, his interests, his amusements, among the lower class of humanity.

From time to time as he was talking he arose and walked to and fro in the room, looking about him absently, as if seeking something. At last Madame Fouquet arose also, and, taking his arm, led him into the adjoining apartment and up to the grand piano. "Here, my friend," she said, gently.

He ran his hand through his hair and groaned. "Of course," he said, "she knows me well, does Betty. Have patience now for a while. I haven't touched a note for twenty-four hours, and the thirsty soul needs refreshment."

He ran his fingers over the keys, and then struck the first chords of one of Beethoven's sonatas.

The Fouquet threw herself into an arm-chair, folded her hands, and listened. Ah, he played wondrously! One began to understand and to admire him as soon

as he sat down at the piano. Yes, one even began to think him handsome, for then his face was majestic, inspired. He played with force, and yet with gentleness, as the sea rolls, as the wind moans among old trees.

When he had finished, the Fouquet arose, went up to him, and laid her hand upon his shoulder. She looked restless and disturbed; he seemed hardly to see her.

“Ah, Sir George, when I hear you play once more, I grow undecided. I seem to hear a menacing voice warning me.”

“What in the name of all the saints do you mean, madame? You look as though conscience were at work. What is it?”

“You know whose hand lifted me up out of the dust,—to whom I owe my laurels, and——”

“Do you mean me?” he asked, a thousand wrinkles suddenly appearing in his forehead. “If you do, then drop your metaphors.”

“I owe them all to you,” she went on; “and therefore to you first I owe the confession that I am about to cast away these laurels.”

“Which means——?”

“That I think of marrying.”

“You? And who is the unhappy man?”

“You flatter me indeed.” And the singer laughed good-humouredly. “Do you suppose that no man can find it possible to bear with Beatrice Fouquet’s whims? Surely another might venture upon what Albert Fouquet undertook.”

“Very well; who is it?”

“Perhaps no one; perhaps only an idea. Who knows? As I listened to your music I was attacked

by strange misgivings. What if I should be about to exchange life for mere vegetation? the ideal for the commonplace? Parnassus for the kitchen?"

"Crescendo!" he exclaimed, clapping his hands. "One of Rossini's first-class arias. And now, Madame Beatrice, descend, I pray you, from your mountain-tops, and deign, as you are compassionate, to give me a glass of claret."

"I wish you did not drink quite so much," she said, gravely.

"Don't be stingy, Beatrice."

They returned to the other room, where Madame Morton was crocheting in immovable majesty. The Fouquet rang the bell; Sir George drank a tumbler of claret, and held out his glass to have it refilled. But she put aside the decanter, and, laying her hand upon his arm, looked searchingly into his eyes. "There must be something wrong with you, Sir George,—you are not easy in your mind. What is it?"

"Nothing, you most inquisitive of women; nothing more than usual."

"How did you happen to come to Berlin just at this time?" she asked, quickly. "If it were to see me, why have you left me to myself for so long? Our friendship—or should I say *my* friendship?—I do not know whether I am anything to you——"

"Good heavens!" he interrupted her, sinking into an arm-chair with an air of resignation; "she is evidently expecting me to make love to her."

"Oh, don't be alarmed; nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I was going to say that my friendship for you is quite independent of frequent personal intercourse; it must always be the same cordial, grateful——"

"Nonsense!" he again interrupted her. "Is this hotel a good one?"

"Excellent."

"Of course, since the Fouquet patronizes it. How much money do you throw out of the window every year for the gilded frame of your existence?"

"Why do you ask such a question?"

"Will your future husband pay your debts?"

"Certainly, if he is a gentleman,—which I have no reason to doubt."

Sir George arose and took his hat. "I am going, Beatrice. I shall probably engage a room here. *Au revoir.*" And he left the room without further ceremony, save a bow towards the lay figure at the window.

It was Sir George O'Halloran who years before had discovered that the little Beatrice—or Betty, as she was commonly called, a child in the village of G—, in Ireland—had a wonderful voice.

Who was Betty? No one knew. She had been charitably received into the household of the priest of the poor little village of G—. She played a Cinderella part in life, tending the goats and geese and running about barefoot all day long. The peasantry of that district were among the poorest in Ireland: they often lacked the barest necessities of existence; their priest was not much better off than his parishioners, and little Betty was often hungry. Sir George easily persuaded the priest to give up the orphan child to his guardianship, and he sent her directly to Italy, to a family of his acquaintance in Milan. These good people trained and educated her for the stage, and they were the parents of Antonio Contelli.

When Sir George saw his *protégée* again she was

a singer of repute, the wife of Albert Fouquet, and the mother of a child. The drama of his life had been played: the sudden death, after but a few days' illness, of his betrothed, the very idol of his strong, ardent heart, had made of him the restless, eccentric being whom we have just seen,—his intense enjoyment of music seeming to be the only relief left him of other days, when life had been filled for him with harmonies, now shattered into discord. His interest in Beatrice and her fortunes was still keen, however; he kept up a constant correspondence with her, and she never ceased to feel for him the most enthusiastic gratitude,—a gratitude which enabled her to overlook his eccentricities and to bear with his changeful moods. She often disputed with him, mourning over his wasted existence; she sometimes laughed at him; but she never forgot that it was his hand that had raised her from the dust of manual labour and opened for her the way to fame and freedom.

CHAPTER IX

SAGES AND ELVES

THE Plattows' drawing-room was brilliantly illuminated, and around the table, with its two tall candelabra, was seated a small company of people, to whom a footman was handing tea, while Marie Louise in violet cachemire that admirably became her brilliant complexion, and her golden diadem of braids, was enacting with great dignity and self-possession the part of hostess.

"Marie Louise has an aesthetic tea for her admirers this evening," little Rhona Bellwitz had whispered to Count Hess in the morning, and, curious to see what she meant, he had accepted an informal invitation from Frau von Plattow, and now made his appearance with Treffenbach.

It was true, Marie Louise was giving a tea to her admirers, but they were not personages of whom Magnus Treffenbach need feel jealous. Around the table sat four or five church dignitaries, men of venerable appearance, with whom she discoursed about missions, orphan asylums, and charitable institutions, with such thorough knowledge of her subject, and with such excellent judgment, that it was impossible not to admire her. These matters formed the chief interest of her life. To convert Ravenhorst into an Eden of order, virtue, and fear of the Lord, had always been her dream. There was no doubt that she already seemed to herself the mistress of the estate, already felt the responsibilities of the position, and had already formed plans for the physical, mental, and moral amelioration of her people.

Such a mind, clear, bright, and strong, inspired by philanthropic ideas, could not fail to arouse the interest of those whose task in life was that of ministering to the wants of the souls of their fellow-men. Much might be looked for in the future from a woman who possessed not only the desire, but also the means, to aid in the great work of the regeneration of mankind. She certainly would exercise a positive and extensive influence in the circle of which she must be a centre. Such women, distinguished by birth and wealth, and animated by an intense desire to do good as far as in them lies, are greatly needed in the church.

They are like genuine jewels among bits of paste and glass, and what shepherd of souls would neglect an opportunity for encouraging and inciting such powerful assistants?

Old Herr and Frau von Plattow had withdrawn to the adjoining apartment, which was more dimly lighted, and where Count Hess joined Herr von Plattow in a game of chess by the light of a shaded lamp. The doors into the next room were wide open, and from the half-light of the apartment where he sat, the Count could see Fräulein von Plattow's tall, slender figure sitting in an arm-chair, as she looked up with grave interest into the face of the Herr Consistorial-rath, who had lately held forth to her upon the evils of the age, and who had now entered upon the second part of his discourse,—namely, their cure. The rest joined in the conversation from time to time, and the large light blue eyes were turned upon whoever was speaking with the same cold, calm expression, which nevertheless revealed a thorough honesty of purpose. Magnus, too, seemed deeply interested in the talk, and sometimes ventured to oppose the views of the clerical dignitaries, who would gravely shake their heads over his remarks and proceed to controvert them with the sage arguments of ripened age. From time to time Marie Louise put some direct question to her betrothed, looking at him as she did so with precisely the same gaze with which she turned to the venerable men,—a look full of intense but purely objective interest.

“She would drive me mad,” thought Armin Hess, mechanically making a move on the chess-board which provoked a slightly triumphant smile on the part of his antagonist, and caused the good old Frau to exult

inwardly, for Count Hess was thought to play an admirable game.

“She is all snow. Pshaw, no! for snow would melt finally,” he thought, as he stroked his long silky moustache, and the old people opposite held a short council of war over the next move to be made.

He was possessed by a strange impatience. For the last hour he had been closely watching the beautiful woman enthroned in the next room, and in all that time her face had never changed. Still the same look of calm attention, never brightened by a smile or interrupted by a blush. No emotion had disturbed the dignified repose of her features.

“Good heavens!” he thought to himself, “I ought to be her lover. Well, and what then? I never would rest until——”

“Eh, eh, my dear Count, what do you say to matters now?” the old gentleman asked, rubbing his hands.

“I am lost.”

“So it seems to me.”

“Unless——” and he smiled as he made a move which no one had foreseen, and by which he became once more master of the situation. For an instant his attention was riveted on the game, but when he raised his eyes he saw nothing save that enigmatical face, felt nothing save a growing desire to disturb that icy calm, to touch that marble heart with a conjurer’s wand. “Magnus is a fool! Instead of puzzling his brains over theological problems, he had better apply himself to investigating his goddess’s capacity to smile. It would be a most interesting study.”

His own thoughts startled him. It is not well to indulge in such fancies. He turned to the game again, but it was too late. He had lost the advantage so

skilfully gained. The old gentleman was triumphant, and exulted loudly. His wife laid her hand gently upon the Count's shoulder. "You are very kind, Count Hess, to spend this time in giving pleasure to us old people, instead of taking part in the interesting conversation going on in the next room."

She spoke with some emotion, and Hess took her hand and carried it reverently to his lips, moved by a sudden impulse of filial tenderness towards the kindly old couple.

"Your mother has a very good son in you, Count Hess."

"Not a very good one, I am afraid."

He thought of his home,—of his father, whose rank and position forced him to maintain a style of living with which his income did not correspond; of his mother, a cold, calculating woman of the world, who was always on the lookout for a wealthy wife for him,—and he suddenly seemed to himself lonely and orphaned; a vague longing for domestic peace, domestic happiness, possessed him.

"Have you any brothers?" the old lady asked, kindly.

"No."

"Or sisters?"

"I had a foster-sister. She was the daughter of a distant relative of my father's."

"What has become of her?"

"She died."

He spoke in a tone which led Frau von Plattow to look up at him. "Ah, that was a great grief to you."

"Perhaps it was best. It decided a question which had caused discord between myself and my parents, who were unwilling to accede to my wishes."

"Ah, I am sorry. I am sure she was gentle and good."

"Too good for me."

There was a pause, interrupted by the moving of the chairs in the adjoining room.

"The gentlemen are going," said Count Hess, rising. "I must bid you good-evening."

But Treffenbach did not seem ready to go yet, and after he had bidden farewell to his betrothed's admirers, lingered a moment to discuss some messages to be sent to the pastor's wife at Velzin. Hess waited for his friend, and together they left the hotel. On the street the Count said, "These six-o'clock teas have one advantage: they give one time to look in at the theatre. I have two tickets here, and, as Schlacken is on duty, I will solemnly endow you with one. Come."

"Nonsense! I have some work to do."

"That is an excuse which can be valid only in the morning. In the evening man needs relaxation."

"If that is your opinion you must keep me away from the theatre. I have no taste for such amusements, and the heat, the close perfumed air—"

"Hush!" the Count said, peremptorily. "If I, for your sake, have endured the sight of those five high-priests, you can do something for mine. The little Fouquet is to appear in public to-night for the first time, and I am going to enjoy her bewitching timidity."

Magnus yielded reluctantly after some further remonstrance. Count Hess assured him that he need not stay longer than half an hour in the theatre; no one was so plebeian as to sit out the whole thing.

The house was full, the insignificant play well begun. Treffenbach glanced towards the stage, and then turned his attention to the audience, among

whom he soon discovered his father. The general recognized his son and looked greatly pleased.

"We might go over to him," said Count Hess; "this thing is wretchedly stupid. I thought we should have come just in time for the scene in which I am interested."

"Bravo, Magnus!" said his Excellency, as the two young men appeared in his box. "I repeat, my dear Armin, you are a priceless friend."

The curtain, which had fallen, was just rising again, disclosing a garden filled with flowers of every hue. In the background were tropical trees and gigantic plants woven together by a tracery of trailing vines. Silvery fountains tossed their spray over the steps of a large white marble basin, upon the clear waters of which lotos-flowers were floating. Gorgeous butterflies and steel-blue dragon-flies hovered in the air, and in every flower-cup an elf was sleeping. Low, melodious music in the distance announced the approach of the God of Love, and at the sound all these airy creatures in gauzy garments and with glittering wings fluttered aloft. The confusion thus caused was about to resolve itself into a dance, when one of the elves was suddenly seen to fall from her airy height. There was a low cry, a dull thud, a momentary silence, a brief word of command, and the curtain fell. The stir this occasioned in the audience was quieted by the speedy rise of the curtain again, and the fairy spectacle proceeded as if nothing had happened.

But a whisper ran from mouth to mouth, "It must have been the little Fouquet. She is not there now. Can you see her?"

"I am sure it was she," Count Hess exclaimed, in-

dignantly. "It is a horrible pity. If there be one delicate flower among the weeds it is sure to be destroyed."

General Treffenbach arose, and stood, tall and dignified, as he remarked, quietly, "I think the Princess Menardi would be glad to have me find out the state of the case. I see she is much agitated."

His son looked at him in surprise, but rather absently. Count Hess offered to make inquiries for him, but his Excellency had already left the box.

"We must go back to our places," said Hess, and his friend assented. In the corridor it seemed as if Hess would fain follow the general. "It would be terrible if it really were she!" he said; "that cry went to my very heart. Such a lovely little creature to be— Treffenbach, you are positively made of marble!"

"Excuse me," Magnus replied, ironically. "I cannot conceive how you can waste such an amount of emotion upon a ballet-girl's sprained ankle. Well, what shall we do? You do not seem disposed to go back to your place. In that case, I will go home."

"Good-night," Hess said, coldly.

Treffenbach did not notice the coldness, and took his departure. His friend hurried to Madame Fouquet's dressing-room. A throng of workmen barred the way thither. They were all greatly excited.

"What has happened to Violetta Fouquet?" he asked, as he forced his way through them.

"What? She fell!" a man replied in a tone which he evidently tried to make rough to conceal emotion. "Go into the room. She is lying there with a broken leg. Why should it happen to just her? She never did harm to any one."

Count Hess entered the open door. There was a crowd of people in the room, but the profound silence was broken only by a woman's low sobs. Upon a mattress on the floor lay a delicate, quivering form in a crushed gauze dress, the glittering wings broken, the flowers in the hair disordered, and with a waxen, lifeless little face.

Beside this couch a surgeon was kneeling, carefully bandaging the broken ankle. At his side stood Madame Fouquet, benumbed by terror, her face hidden in her handkerchief. But Violetta's head rested on the arm of the man who had hurried to relieve the Princess Menardi's anxiety. His hand was stroking the soft dark curls from the pale brow with paternal tenderness.

“Have you finished?” he asked the surgeon.

“In an instant, your Excellency. Now bring the litter, Herr Assistant, that the mattress may be lifted on it. It is of the first importance that not a moment be lost. The limb cannot be bandaged as it should be until the patient is at home.”

“Can I do anything to help?” asked Count Hess,—“bring people to carry the litter?”

“Thanks,” the surgeon replied, with a smile; “there are a dozen workmen outside the door who are ready to fight for that honour.”

General von Treffenbach arose, offered his arm to Beatrice Fouquet, and conducted her in silence through the increasing crowd, following the litter, upon which lay the motionless figure, covered with a mantle, as if it were dead. There was something in the mute procession that seemed to suggest the terror of the grave, and that filled the singer's emotional soul with fear and dread. As she took the arm offered her she looked

up at the general with imploring eyes, as if beseeching aid,—as if he could protect her and banish the terrible visions of this hour.

CHAPTER X

GENERAL MONTRÉSOR

THE next morning the accident that had befallen Madame Fouquet's daughter was known throughout the capital, and the universal sympathy was perhaps even more warm and genuine than it would have been had the singer been the victim. Beatrice Fouquet, wherever she went, reaped fame and laurels. Violetta was more loved than praised. All who had once seen her in her fresh young beauty preserved a tender recollection of her. Her timidity upon the stage, and her gentle self-possession in society, formed a contrast that touched even the indifferent. Many a friendly eye had been turned upon her with a certain compassion. What would the life upon the threshold of which stood this joyous and confiding child bring her with the coming years? Some, seeing the admiration and praise which were showered upon her, at first shook their heads in disapproval, prophesying that her character would be ruined, her vanity only nourished; but when brought into contact with her innocence and purity, her constant thought of others, they too had nothing for her but praise.

Hence there was a constant stream of carriages rolling to the door of the hotel, and the inquiries

after the young sufferer were endless. Sir George was one of the earliest visitors. In the ante-room he found Contelli, who had been stationed there by Madame Fouquet to answer all inquiries. The poor fellow looked as if the world had suddenly come to an end for him; but Sir George paid no attention to his timid declaration that the Signora could receive no one: he passed directly into the music-room adjoining Madame Beatrice's private drawing-room. In the cold, comparatively bare music-room the fêted singer was wont to receive callers,—the inner room, always filled with flowers, she reserved for her intimate friends. No barriers existed for Sir George, who, in the few days that had elapsed since his arrival in the capital, had won his way to Violetta's heart by his exquisite music, and still more by the thorough kindness of nature that shone through his rough exterior, and by the warm interest he had shown in her poor little *protégés* in the back street. He, on his part, had been roused to unwonted interest in 'Betty's child,' mistrusting her mother's power to develop this delicate flower, who seemed born to breathe about her, and over all who came within her influence, the fragrance of natural purity and unselfishness. He had been much opposed to Violetta's appearance in the fairy spectacle, and had made this known in his own rough way, that, antagonistic though it were to Violetta's delicate gentleness of temperament, had yet been so welcome a support to her own reluctance that he seemed to her the truest of friends.

He now passed hastily through the music-room into the smaller room beyond, where in place of the divan he found a large reclining-chair, upon which Violetta lay with closed eyes. From the window Madame

Morton, still crocheting, cast a forbidding glance at the intruder.

“Oh, Sir George!” Violetta said, suddenly opening her eyes.

“Well, little one, what is all this that I hear about you?” He spoke rather roughly, for he was not quite sure of steadying his voice at sight of the little face bereft of every trace of colour and with dark bluish rings encircling the beautiful childlike eyes. She smiled at him heroically, however, and whispered,—

“Ah, you know how glad, how thankful I am! And you know why——”

Then came a deep sigh, and she closed her eyes again.

“Where is your mother?” he asked.

“Ah, poor mamma has been watching and crying all night long. She was so tired, but she would not lie down; she has gone to dress, for she said some one might come whom she should be obliged to see. Ah, Sir George, be kind to poor mamma. She will be so disappointed.”

“She has no cause for disappointment that I can see, but much for distress.”

“But, Sir George, she is distressed too; be good to her.”

The whispering came to an end, for Beatrice Fouquet entered the room. In spite of the weariness and anxiety of a night spent in watching, she had dressed with great care, and had evidently endeavoured to banish from her face all trace of tears.

“Well, madame,” Sir George said, “it was hardly fair of you not to send for me when you were in such trouble. What are old friends good for if they cannot be made use of at such times?”

“Thank you,”—and she held out her hand to him,—“but you could have done no good. The surgeon was very skilful, but he would not give her chloroform; he said she was too delicate. And so she had to bear the pain.”

“Ah, mamma, I did not mind the pain,” said Violetta.

“See here,”—and as she spoke Beatrice emptied a mother-of-pearl shell filled with cards,—“would you not like to see who has already been to ask after you?”

“Ah, every one is so kind,” the girl said, with a sigh. “I do not deserve it all. You will not forget, mamma, to say that I am convinced that the machinist was not to blame; it was all my own awkwardness. Please remember that he is not to be scolded.”

“His Excellency General von Treffenbach,” the servant announced at the door.

The beautiful woman’s face flushed slightly, and there were traces of embarrassment in her air. She arose and went into the music-room, where in the midst of the chill surroundings the general stood erect and tall, like a soldier in the antechamber of his queen.

He did not raise her hand to his lips, he bowed very, very low over it, and his deep voice was not perfectly steady as he asked, in words that were perhaps too measured, for tidings of Fräulein Fouquet.

“The poor child has suffered much,” was the reply, “but now she is more comfortable. She slept towards morning, and has but little fever. She would surely be glad, your Excellency——”

“Can I see her?”

Madame Fouquet led the way into the next room.

He entered, bowed to Madame Morton, and to Sir George with courteous ease, but in the latter case with the air of a superior to an inferior; then went to Violetta's side, and took her hand in both his. "My poor little child!" he said.

"Ah, my General Montrésor!" Violetta exclaimed, eagerly. "I always forget the other name, and that is ungrateful when you are so kind. How is Montrésor? And why have you not come for me to ride lately?"

"Never mind, my child: when you are well we will make up for lost time."

"General von Treffenbach," said Madame Fouquet, "I pray you to allow me to make you acquainted with my oldest and kindest friend, Sir George O'Halloran."

His Excellency bowed rather coldly. The conversation turned for ten minutes upon accidents of various kinds, and then he rose to go. Beatrice accompanied him to the outer door of the music-room. "I have not yet thanked you," she said, smiling, and with bewitching confusion; "you were so kind yesterday evening."

"I regret most deeply that the first occasion upon which I have been able to be of some slight service to you should have been so sad a one."

As he followed these formal phrases with a chivalric pressure of his lips upon her hand, his eyes, those eyes before which so many trembled, spoke an ardent language of their own.

"This accident will prolong your stay in our capital?" he said, inquiringly.

"Of course; for six weeks at least."

"I condole with you, madame, but I must congratulate ourselves."

When the door closed after him, she stood beside it listening for a few minutes, and then, seating herself at the piano, she sang a low, sweet gondola-song.

Sir George came into the room with his hands clasped behind him, stationed himself at the back of the music-stool, beat time with the tips of his boots, and wagged his bushy head from side to side. She interrupted her song, let her hands rest upon the keys, and turned round to him, her large eyes sparkling, one could not tell whether with tears or with merriment.

"Do you like him?" she asked. "Eh?"

"Not at all, madame, if it pleases you to hear it."

"Oh, I do not care very much either way, since you cannot marry him." She laughed.

"I wish the devil had flown away with him before you had contemplated such folly, Beatrice!" he burst out, angrily. "What are you thinking of? Was it for this that I dragged you forth from darkness into the light, and placed the crown of genius on your head? Is it for this that you have mounted from step to step on your victorious way,—to grasp at last, as the final prize, the greatest jewel—a title? Pitiable, Madame Fouquet; degrading, despicable! Her Excellency Betty!—admirable indeed! For such a gewgaw Beatrice Fouquet lays down her sceptre. For you are a queen. You reign over thousands. You can inspire, delight, refine, touch, convulse—where shall I find more words?—thousands. You can scatter blessings everywhere if you will but rightly understand your mission, and allow the loftiest, noblest ideas to be revealed through you! And she turns her back upon all these to be—an Excellency! But it is no business of mine. Why should I excite myself? Pshaw!"

Do it! Go on! Forswear yourself! Deny your vocation! Exchange Parnassus for the kitchen! Have yourself called Your Excellency a hundred times daily by servile fools! The punishment will surely come some day, and you will moan with Esau. Then think of me and of my warning."

She had thus far sat perfectly motionless, her hands still resting on the keys. She now looked over her shoulder at him and smiled. "I like too well to hear you talk thus to interrupt you," she said at last. "Now, while you take breath, let me tell you that if my aims had been as despicable as you suppose, I might long since have had the pleasure of hanging that jingling bell about my neck, for there are many who have thought to win Beatrice Fouquet by the glitter of a title."

"And if it be not rank and title that can tempt you to descend from your Olympus," he asked, mistrustfully, "tell me what you hope to gain,—wealth, power, influence?"

"None of these. The reason why I wish to become this man's wife is an astounding one. You can never guess it."

"So it seems. Be brief, then, I beg of you, and enlighten me."

She arose now, and looked calmly at her eccentric friend. "I love him," she said with a simple grace that certainly had a surprising effect.

Sir George said nothing at first, but his features worked more strangely than ever. Suddenly he passed his hand across his eyes, and then held it out to her. "Forgive me," he said.

"Ah," she laughed, "at every word you spoke I said to myself, 'I forgive him!'"

Meanwhile, General Treffenbach returned to his home, where he found his son at luncheon.

"So it always is," said Magnus, helping himself to a sardine. "After Armin's reproaching me so bitterly of late for my hermit-like seclusion, I wanted to enjoy your society, sir, in a ride to-day, but just on this special morning you had vanished without a trace. I rode nearly to Charlottenburg in the hope of finding you somewhere, for Friedrich told me you had walked out."

The general devoted all his energies to the cutting of a delicate slice of the cold chicken before him. "Have a slice of this, Magnus? It is very good. And what kind of a ride did you have? Did you meet any one whom you knew?"

"Only that sallow little Princess, who was driving with her son. When she saw me she beckoned to me to stop, and asked after you; whereupon her son ventured upon the witty remark that you were his mother's 'chartered' adorer. They both said a great deal that was flattering about Montrésor, declaring, however, that it was a lady's horse. Of course I placed her at her Highness's disposal."

"Your evening at the theatre last night seems to have put you into a very cheerful humour, my dear Magnus, although there was very little reason for its doing so."

Treffenbach looked as if he were wondering what his father's meaning could be. At last he said, "I think it always makes us more satisfied to acknowledge where we have been wrong. I have reflected upon Armin's reproof, and have admitted to myself that you had good reason to complain of me. You shall not have to coax me forth from my study again. I

will gladly go with you wherever you desire. For who knows when we shall have another chance of being together quietly for so long a time?"

His Excellency cast a searching glance at his son. "I hope, my dear boy, that whatever the future may bring forth, nothing will shake your confidence in me, or alter our relations towards each other."

"That you surely cannot doubt, sir," his son rejoined in some surprise.

Late one afternoon, about a week after this, it occurred to Magnus that his father had spoken of paying a visit at the Plattows'. Perhaps they might go together, and he went immediately to search for him. He was not in the library or the dining-room, but through the open door of the drawing-room his son saw him standing by his wife's favourite window. Lost in thought, but with a strange intensity in his look, as if watching some object in the sky, he was gazing out; one hand rested upon the table,—that table which was indissolubly connected in Magnus's mind with his mother's presence,—and as he watched his father's motionless figure he too stood still. He could not take his eyes from that face, so full of manly energy and resolution.

"Father!" he said at last, with some hesitation.

As if startled by a thunder-clap, the general turned, passing his hand as he did so over the surface of the table, whence several photographs fell to the floor. Before Magnus could reach them his father had picked them up and thrust them into his breast-pocket, saying, "You positively startled me. What is the matter?"

"Excuse my abruptness. I only wanted to ask you whether you meant to go to the Plattows' to-day."

"Ah, yes, of course. Let us go now; you are quite right, my dear boy."

They walked along together, the general seeming rather silent. Once he paused before the window of a picture-shop, and Magnus naturally followed his example. In the midst of many pictures and photographs was the likeness of a young girl in an oval frame. From beneath the broad brim of a felt hat a face looked out at the beholder with an expression of innocent gayety. The large eyes, the delicate nose, the arch mouth, the indescribably refined outline of the head, made a very lovely picture.

A crowd was constantly before this window. Treffenbach had noticed it in the morning without caring to discover the reason why.

His Excellency, however, who was usually wont to hold himself aloof from all contact with Hodge and Hans, stood here shoulder to shoulder with a man in a blouse, and endured with great equanimity the shoving and pushing of a fat huckster-woman, while he seemed to take a certain interest in the comments of the throng.

"Poor young lassie," the huckster remarked; "it's no business of ours, and it all comes of being one of those playerfolk, but indeed I can't help a pityin' of her. Why, she bought a apple of me once, and she asked me about the kids at home, and how old they were, and laughed so gay. Ah, she's no more than a child herself."

Treffenbach grew rather impatient, but he said nothing. That face might have been seen for some time past, taken from various points of view, in photographers' cases and picture-dealers' shops. He had noticed it now and then, without ever troubling himself to

inquire whom it represented. An actress probably, or one of a circus troupe. As he could not possibly suppose that it was this picture that so engaged his father's attention, he looked about for some military or hunting piece, but could see nothing of the kind.

"Come," said the general at last. "The people crowd so. The picture is very like, is it not?"

"What picture?"

"The little Fouquet. Good heavens, Magnus! you saw her at the Princess Menardi's."

"I think not. I remember now that I only heard her mentioned. In fact, I do not know who she is. Armin sometimes has very questionable enthusiasms. There was a certain Mascha at St. Petersburg who pretended to be a countess, but who was in reality an adventuress and was finally prosecuted by law. I was obliged to use all the eloquence of which I was master to prevent him from losing his head entirely. I should be very sorry if this were an affair of the same kind. Fouquet,—Fouquet? The name has rather a disreputable sound, and I have heard it continually of late. There's something wrong; that fellow never will learn wisdom."

Absorbed in his annoyance, Magnus had not even looked at his father. The general walked on beside him, carrying himself as proudly and with features as composed as ever, but his colour changed: he grew rather pale.

In a few minutes, however, he began to converse again, and, as if he had already forgotten the subject last mentioned, replied to some indifferent remark of his son's, and led the talk to topics of general interest. Before Magnus was aware of it he found himself listening to a long lecture from his father, upon the true

chivalric spirit, upon boasted virtue, prejudice, and obstinate adherence to old predilections with regard to rank and birth.

He spoke objectively, and yet Treffenbach could almost have believed that his father intended to read him a sharp lesson. But of course this could not be so, for where, pray, was the need?

As they ascended the broad steps of the hotel, two ladies clad in black were coming down, one of whom, whose face was thickly veiled, was of a notable elegance of figure and gait. The general bowed courteously, and they acknowledged his greeting without pausing.

"Who was that?" asked Treffenbach, when they had passed out of hearing. "I did not know that we had other acquaintances here in the hotel."

"That was—and I must beg you to excuse me for mentioning the name again—that was Madame Fouquet and her companion." With these words he gave his card to the servant who stood waiting for it.

The Plattows were not alone. The Bellwitzes were there, and Lieutenant Schlacken and Count Hess, also the old Consistorial-rath, who seemed to take a paternal interest in Marie Louise. While Rhona and Schlacken vied with each other in descriptions of the latest balls, Fräulein von Plattow conversed with the clerical gentlemen about serious matters, and Count Hess sat beside them, a silent but attentive listener, his handsome face, with the drooping moustache, fully shown in the light of a lamp. And while Fräulein von Plattow thought within herself that next to Magnus this young man had more interest in spiritual affairs than any other whom she had ever met, he on his part was delighting in her honest

devotion to truth, in the grave sincerity with which she spoke of her faults, in the conscientiousness with which she was trying to do her duty. He had divined her aright: whatever she thought she said. She would have thought it wrong to conceal or to colour an opinion. She was transparent as crystal, and this made the problem of her nature all the more inscrutable, and all the more did the question besiege him, 'Is she utterly incapable of one throb of feeling?'

Oh, yes! Marie Louise was capable of indignation. Only tell her of some dishonest transaction, of odious falsehood, of the triumph of evil over Christian principle, and for a moment her cheek would flush crimson, her delicate brows would contract, and she would exhaust herself in indignant protest. Such an outburst of righteous anger became her well, but would not exclamations of joy and delight have become her much better?

He puzzled his brain with these fruitless speculations as by turns she amused, irritated, and surprised him, still always irresistibly attracting him by her cold repose.

Madame Fouquet had been obliged to leave her daughter, as this evening she sang Margarethe, with which part she closed her present engagement in the capital, and Sir George stationed himself beside the girl's couch for a couple of hours. All the tenderness of his nature was called forth by the sight of this patient sufferer, who had so lately seemed to him the very embodiment of grace, of joy in existence. He exhausted himself in devices for her amusement, her entertainment, and of his music she never wearied. On this special evening it appeared that the immova-

ble Madame Morton had shown herself but mortal after all, since she had boldly transgressed her rule of silence, and, left in charge of the invalid, had employed the afternoon in detailing wonderful stories of the most distinguished personages of the capital, where, as it now turned out, she had spent some time many years previously, as companion to an old countess. Violetta had been intensely interested in learning that her General Montré sor, as she called him, "had a wife, Sir George, a wife who was so good, so kind to the poor. Madame Morton says she was too good to live, and her son loved her so; the son is living now, but the dear lady is dead. Ah! why do such good people always die?"

"That, little one, is a question with which I advise you to have as little to do as possible. Your general does not look as if it troubled him much."

"And Baron Treffenbach—that is the son's name—is sure to be a famous man: he knows so much already, and studies all the time; and he owes all that he is to his mother, whom I am sure he never can forget. I hope I shall see him some day,—when I can drive out once more. Madame Morton says he is very handsome, and I think he must be like the Chevalier Bayard. And oh, Sir George,—how could I forget to tell you at once?—I have so good a piece of news for you,—it makes me forget all the pain I have had. The doctor says I can never be a dancer now. Some weakness—I can't understand what—there will always be in the ankle, and so there is an end of that horrible public. Ah, you can't tell how happy and grateful I am!"

"Your tongue trips fast enough, little one. It will make up for your feet. God bless you, child! I'm grateful too!"

CHAPTER XI

‘LOVE IS LORD OF ALL’

Two full months—March and April—are gone, and a few days ago May celebrated its birthday with wreaths of feathery green and a concert from the throats of hundreds of birds.

Madame Fouquet had many weeks previously exchanged the hotel in town for a charming little villa among blooming gardens and shady, frequented roads. She had done this as soon as Violetta’s ankle was in a condition to allow of her being moved. Then several weeks had elapsed of patient lying on the couch until the first attempts at walking could be made; but on this delicious May day, when all nature was bathed in glittering splendour, refreshed by the warm rain that had fallen in the night, the girl was sauntering lightly, although still carefully, through the garden and up the steps of the veranda, her arms filled with narcissus flowers. She wore a soft white gown with pink ribbons. Her broad white hat hung upon her arm; her curls were tossed about her forehead and glowing cheeks, and her eyes were sparkling.

Madame Fouquet, a book in her hand, was leaning back in a low arm-chair in the shadiest corner of the hall, which was closed in with glass and wreathed all about with trailing plants and vines. Beside her was her table with its vase of flowers and a basket of fancy-work, and Tom was on his gilded perch near by, muttering his displeasure at the flitting swallows out-

side as they now and then alighted on the window-sills.

"How warm you are, Violetta!" said Madame Fouquet, looking up. "Don't you know that you ought to avoid any unusual exertion?"

"But not unusual enjoyment, mamma. Look at these lovely flowers. The woman whose children I sent the apples to last winter gave them to me. She was going by the grated gate at the bottom of the garden with a huge basket of flowers, and when she saw me she clapped her hands and laughed. Unfortunately, I could not understand all she said, but she was very kind, and gave me all these. Oh, dear! my German lessons do not seem to have taught me all they should have done. I must look in the dictionary for 'hopping,'—she said there must be an end of that. It's another word I never have seen or heard before." And Violetta sat down in a low chair and began to arrange her flowers.

Madame Beatrice was apparently absorbed in her novel, but any one observing her closely might have noticed that her eyes frequently wandered from its pages and were fixed on space, with what looked something like expectation. Beatrice was not of those who, on a day like the present, dreamily gaze up into the budding chestnuts or the blue skies with vague emotions of delight. When she lost herself in musing she looked out into the shady road, for human beings are surely more interesting than chestnut-buds.

"What day of the month is it, Violetta?"

"The ninth of May, mamma."

"Ah, I thought so."

"What a long, long time we have been here in Ber-

lin!" said the girl; "to me it seems years. Are we going from here to Milan, or to Vienna?"

"Do you want to go away from here?"

"No, mamma; I should not like to leave my poor little children whom Sir George has done so much for, and then every one has been kind to us, although lately we have lived here so quietly. One thing surprises me. At first General von Treffenbach was the kindest to me of all. He came every day, and sent me flowers and bonbons, and even toys, as if I were a little child. I cared a great deal for him. And then suddenly he stopped coming. Why was it, mamma? Do you know?"

Beatrice smiled and fanned herself. "Perhaps I sent him away, my child."

"Oh!" Violetta whispered, looking reflectively at her mother. "I once overheard Carolina say that you were going to marry him."

"Marriage is a serious matter, little one, and needs grave consideration." This she said in a motherly tone, and then she began to laugh. "This is the ninth of May, child. Should you like to drive to town to see your little *protégées* with Madame Morton?"

"Oh, mamma!" Violetta exclaimed, delighted, for such an indulgence was rare. Beatrice Fouquet did not regard her daughter's philanthropic tastes with much favour, but since Sir George had interested himself in having the poorest and most neglected of Violetta's beneficiaries—some small orphans—well clothed and placed under the care of a worthy woman,—a Frau Forstmann, the widow of a former business agent of Sir George's,—Madame Fouquet had consented that Violetta should visit them from time to time.

Violetta was supremely happy. She hurried into

the drawing-room,—an attractive little retreat, with flowered chintz hangings and furniture that gave it a very summer-like air. Here Madame Morton was ensonced with her crochet, and to her the charming plan was immediately unfolded. The carriage was ordered, and as soon as lunch was over they started upon their expedition.

Fortunately, as Violetta thought, her sedate companion had so many eommisions to fulfil for Madame Fouquet, that when the carriage drove off, leaving the girl at the neat little dwelling where Sir George had established her favourites, a long, undisturbed afternoon was in prospect. But after her gifts had been distributed, and a small Hans had displayed his new accomplishments in the way of reading and writing, and the little girls had shown their patchwork, and all had listened entranced to their pretty lady's beautiful stories, Violetta was seized with a sudden desire to carry some flowers she had brought with her to an invalid niece of Carolina's to whom she had shown many an aet of kindness. She silenced Frau Forstmann's remonstrances by assuring her that the girl's home was but a very short distance away, and that she would return immediately, after which she set off, nothing doubting. She had forgotten the intricate plan of the streets in this portion of the capital, and, to her dismay, soon became confused and finally utterly bewildered. She grew anxious and tried to ask her way, but whether she was misunderstood, or whether she did not rightly comprehend the directions given to her, each step that she took seemed but to carry her to regions more and more unfamiliar to her. In her anxiety she hardly noticed at first that her foot, still unused to such exertion, began to pain her. Sho

had reached a rather dim street, where there were few passers-by and still fewer vehicles. Struggling with the pain and a strong desire to cry, she drew her veil more tightly across her burning cheeks, and was looking for the name of the street, when her ankle suddenly gave way. Supporting herself against a railing, she gazed around her in despair, and saw directly opposite, on the other side of the street, the open door of a church. If she could enter there and rest awhile, the pain and weakness might pass away. She crossed the street, leaning upon her parasol, dragged herself up the steps, and sought shelter within the venerable gray walls, as a wounded bird flies to a protecting hedge. How cool and quiet it was here! Through the tall, narrow windows a dim light penetrated the interior, showing the majestic pillars that sustained the vaulted roof. Violetta gazed dreamily about her. She had never before been inside of a Protestant place of worship, and there was something inexpressibly soothing and awe-inspiring in the quiet, unadorned grandeur of the gray old pile. Suddenly the entire church began slowly to turn about her, the outlines of pillar, arch, and vaulted roof grew vague and indistinct, lovely, gentle tones were wafted down from the mighty organ, seeming to wrap her round as in a soft veil, and she fainted.

A sharp pang restored her to consciousness. She opened her eyes and tried to collect her thoughts. Good heavens, where was she? In the glimmering twilight of a church! Some one bending over her had tried to lift her up, and had caused the pain that had roused her. Violetta had no fear of strangers, least of all of one offering aid in her forlorn condition.

"Are you ill, my child?" the stranger asked. She could not answer immediately, her brain was still confused, but at last she arrived at a clear consciousness that Madame Morton would be waiting.

"Oh, what o'clock is it?" she exclaimed.

The stranger took out his watch and made it repeat, for it had grown too dark in the church to see the time by it. The watch struck half-past six. He repeated his question, "Are you ill?"

"Oh, no, not ill," Violetta murmured, still confused. "But my foot——"

"Try to stand. I will lift you up. So! Ah, it was a fortunate thing that I happened to come into the church. You might otherwise have been locked up here."

She scarcely heard what he said. She stood leaning against him, dizzy, trembling, and entirely unable to use her foot. "Oh, I cannot!" she said, looking up into a grave, manly face and thoughtful eyes bent upon her in serious deliberation.

"What is to be done?" he said, more to himself than to her. "Can I get a carriage?"

"Oh, do not go away!" Violetta entreated. "I will do whatever you say, only do not leave me alone."

"What shall I do, my poor little child?"

"Carry me. They say I am as light as a feather."

He silently lifted her in his arms, with just the shadow of a smile on the grave face, now so near her own.

"They are quite right," he said, as he walked through the church with his light burden. "You do not weigh more than a little fawn. And whither now?" as they emerged into the darkening streets.

"Madame Morton and the carriage were to be at

36 Johanns-strasse. Oh, what will she say, and will she be there still?"

"It is not far, and I can get there in a few moments by side-streets. Put your arm about my neck; it will be easier for you."

He gave this direction in so business-like a tone that she obeyed him as she would have obeyed a doctor's command, saying, with a sigh, "Thank you, you are very kind."

In her first terror, on recovering her consciousness, she had pushed aside her veil, but now it had fallen over her face again. Her protector, however, seemed not at all curious to scan the features of this pretty child. He looked like a man anxious to fulfil an evident duty, but feeling no further interest in the matter. He asked no more questions. He knew where to take her, and that was enough.

A crowd of workmen coming along one of the narrowest streets barred the way for a moment, and seemed inclined to be insolent. The face of her protector grew stern and haughty, but as he turned to reassure the child in his arms, thinking she would be terrified, to his surprise she raised her head, and in a fearless and indignant tone exclaimed, "For shame! for shame! Let this kind gentleman pass. He has trouble enough with carrying me!" And the men silently made way.

This seemed to arouse her new friend's interest. "You are a brave little girl," he said, kindly.

"Brave? Ah, no one calls me that. I surely have no need for bravery so long as you are taking care of me."

"I? Who am I? For you I am no one. How do you know that I mean well by you and will carry you where you wish to go?"

"Oh, I am quite sure."

"But why?"

"You were in the church," Violetta replied, simply.

"You are right!" he rejoined, evidently impressed, and he walked on in silence, until, upon turning a corner, Violetta exclaimed, with a sigh of unspeakable relief, "Ah, there is the carriage!"

All honour to Madame Morton's inflexible calm. In spite of the anxiety and uncertainty of the last hour, there she sat, grave disapproval, to be sure, on her features, but determined to wait until Violetta should appear. They should have been at home at seven; it was past that hour now, but excitement and agitation would have been useless, and consequently they were not brought into play.

Her noble composure was richly rewarded, for there came the truant, not upon her own feet, but, to the astonishment of the passers-by, carried in the arms of a distinguished-looking stranger. Madame Morton instantly divined why this was so: the child had over-exerted herself, and her ankle had refused its support. Madame Fouquet's daughter would never be prudent, but that Madame's companion could not help.

The stranger placed Violetta in the carriage, and bowed to the other lady. "I am very sorry," he said, "but this poor child has met with an accident."

"So I see," the lady remarked. "Her foot, I suppose. We are greatly indebted to you, sir."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Violetta. "Oh, sir, how can I thank you?"

The stranger did not respond to her warm expression of gratitude; he only bowed, uttered a few courteous words of farewell, lifted his hat, and was gone, as the impatient horses trotted swiftly towards home.

"Oh," sighed Violetta, "how anxious mamma will be!"

Had Beatrice Fouquet been anxious?

After Violetta had left her, she went out on the veranda again and took up her book, but she could not fix her attention; her eyes wandered towards the road; she became possessed by a nervous impatience. The afternoon shadows lengthened on the little lawn. The birds ceased to flit restlessly hither and thither, and sang softly among the trees.

Beatrice looked at her watch, and her eyes flashed angrily. "It was a pretence, then," she murmured. "This they call persistence! Ah, put them to the test, ask for patience, endurance, fidelity. What other would have submitted to such banishment? And yet I was so proud that he went and did not return. I felt sure then that my heart would triumph over what Sir George calls my mission. Folly! folly! I will leave to-morrow; this city shall know me no more!"

She started up, hurried into the drawing-room, and rang the bell. Carolina must begin packing instantly.

Suddenly she hesitated and listened; then, going to the window, she looked out at all of the garden-path that could be seen through the vines of the veranda.

A burning blush dyed her cheeks; she held back the curtain with one hand and laughed,—anger, scorn, disappointment, all forgotten.

A tall, distinguished-looking man in uniform ascended the veranda steps. He looked about him, uncertain whether to pass into the house through the open door or to search for a bell. His face was pale, and showed signs of agitation; the large, keen eyes sparkled with

expectation, while the lips were compressed, as if in memory of struggle and resolve.

And Beatrice Fouquet loved this man with the entire energy of her mercurial nature. Eight weeks of reflection, of separation, had only served to make her blind and deaf to the promptings of reason.

He stood in the door-way looking at her, and she came towards him, joy and triumph beaming in her eyes. She placed both her hands in his, looked up at him with an enchanting smile, and said, "Poor man! your reprieve is at an end, and you come with heroic promptitude to enter upon a lifelong servitude."

He carried her hands to his lips, and whispered with a profound sigh, "Ah, enchantress, you knew that I counted the days!"

She looked at him, smiled, and rejoined, "And I counted them too."

And thus it happened that a proud, ambitious, experienced man of the world laid his name, his title, his ambition, his career, at the feet of a Beatrice Fouquet!

CHAPTER XII

A REVELATION

FRAULEIN EMMA had just had the coffee-urn placed upon the breakfast-table; she looked at the clock,—eight o'clock all but five minutes. She knew very well that as the hour was striking the Herr Attaché would enter, and about ten minutes later his Excellency would make his appearance.

The brilliant morning sunshine lay broad on the floor of the pleasant apartment, and gilded the coat of arms carved above the mantel-piece. Through the open folding-doors could be seen the drawing-room, where, upon the little table of the general's late wife, near the window, stood a large dish filled with fresh monthly roses, and wreaths of evergreen were twined about the two portraits on the wall of the master of the house and its gentle mistress, taken many years ago.

Fräulein Emma sighed as she contemplated her thoughtful memorials of the day, and knotted beneath her chin a new black lace kerchief.

The clock struck eight, and at the same instant the son of the house entered the room. He and Fräulein Emma were wont simply to exchange a 'good-morning,' but to-day he held out his hand to her. His glance had fallen upon the pictures in the drawing-room.

"Ah, Baron Magnus," sighed the Fräulein, "if she had but lived until to-day what a happy celebration there would have been! How she would have enjoyed passing her wedding-day in the midst of her nearest and dearest! And Fräulein Marie Louise would have brought her a basket of roses, and you might have been married on this very day, Baron Magnus."

"Perhaps so," he said, with a sigh.

"Ah, how melancholy it is to reflect that it is the best among us who are called away,—those who might bestow such blessings by living!"

"Such women as my mother," he replied, gravely, "continue to bestow blessings even after they have left us; their works survive them, their memory lives on. Even here in this house"—he looked around him,

and a tender expression crept over his stern dark face,—"even here it is as if her spirit were still present. At first the house seemed utterly desolate to me, but now I have learned to look for her here, and to find her. Often when I sit at my books I fancy I feel her hand upon my shoulder and can hear her gentle voice."

"Ah, yes; how gently she always came in with that sweet smile, Baron Magnus, and would arrange a flower here and there, and change the place of a book! When she left the room she seemed to have made it look pleasanter. Oh, dear! and on this, her wedding-day, she was always kinder than ever."

The door opened, and his Excellency appeared upon the threshold. "Good-morning, Magnus. Well, my dear Emma, what has happened to bring tears again to your eyes? Have you been quarrelling with my son?"

"Ah, your Excellency, forgive me. I took the liberty on this special day—"

"Special day?" he asked, surprised. A proud smile lit up his features. "Upon this special day I see no cause for tears, and I beg for cheerful faces and cordial good wishes. But, first of all, a cup of coffee."

The other two looked at each other as if trying to discover the reason for this cheerful mood upon a day which might well have been for the general one of the saddest of the year. Was it possible that he had forgotten what day it was?

A keen pang, the foreboding of coming pain, shot through his son's soul as he glanced at his father's soldierly, untroubled face. He did not look like a mourning widower on the first lonely anniversary

of his marriage, but rather like the crowned victor in some martial game.

The conversation turned upon various subjects. The general asked if Magnus had heard lately from Marie Louise, who had returned several weeks before with her grandparents to Ravenhorst, the doctors having pronounced the old Herr's eyes to be in a fair way of recovery. Marie Louise kept up a regular correspondence with her betrothed. Unwilling as she had been to come to Berlin, she had left it quite as unwillingly, for she had found there much that interested her extremely. Constant intellectual intercourse with learned, clever men, the variety of human interests brought into daily play, the struggle of light with darkness in the higher regions of civilization, all these she missed in the monotonous repose of rural seclusion.

Count Hess also had left Berlin for Brussels some time previously. He had never been much of a correspondent, but Magnus thought that he had never known him so disinclined to write as at present. He had in fact received but one letter from him, that in which he announced his safe arrival.

These matters were discussed, and yet none of the three persons at table were really interested. Fräulein Emma had given up all hope that her revered general would of himself remember that twenty-eight years ago he had stood before the marriage altar. She did so in his stead, and gave herself up to memories of the departed. Magnus was unaccountably annoyed by his father's calm cheerfulness, and, ah, *she* was no longer here to play the part of mediator, to put the best construction upon everything, ready always to explain to the son why the father acted thus and so!

Breakfast was over much more quickly than usual. The servant entered, cleared the table, and laid the morning's mail before his master. Fräulein Emma took up her basket of keys and left the room, for the general was wont to indulge in a cigar while he read the morning papers. But on this morning they were not unfolded. His Excellency drummed a march with his fingers on the table, and gazed absently out of the window.

"Cast a glance at those flowers and wreaths, my dear father," Magnus said at last, pointing through the drawing-room door. "Emma has taken so much pains to show you her regard."

The look which his Excellency now cast upon the flowers and the portraits was so puzzled, that it would evidently have been as well to enlighten him by hanging up a curtain of crape.

"Ah, indeed? indeed? Magnus, my boy, what I wanted to say was— Friedrich has gone, I believe? You will be surprised; you will be astounded—"

"Hardly, after this introduction," the young man rejoined, with a smile. "Have you obtained for me a special mission to Pekin? or have you been made general field-marshall?"

The general's laugh sounded forced. "No, no, nothing in that line. But can you not guess, my boy? Have you observed nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Dear me; you certainly would have made but a poor affair of diplomacy; it is well you relinquished that career. Well, then, Magnus, have you never contemplated the possibility of my—marrying again?"

Magnus started up as if he had been shot. His Excellency also arose. They confronted each other

mute and pale. The general passed his handkerchief across his forehead ; it had cost him an heroic effort to pronounce these last words. For his son's face wore an expression of horror, not very encouraging in a position which at the best is rather unnatural,—confessions of this sort being usually made by sons to fathers.

“ Forgive me, sir, I did not quite understand,” Trefenbach said at last, in a low voice, trying to collect himself, as his look wandered to the gentle face of the wretched portrait hanging beside his father's.

“ My dear boy, what is there so extraordinary in the matter ? Am I so aged as to have done with life ?” And as the general spoke, he glanced towards a mirror that reflected his athletic figure, his resolute soldierly features, and smiled. Then he looked again at his son, and was startled by the intense pallor of the cold, grave face. “ Good heavens, Magnus ! You're not going to faint ?”

“ Do not be afraid ; I shall not faint. A slight vertigo,—nothing more. And is it to be wondered at ? It cannot be true,—no, it cannot. And on this day of all others !”

“ I cannot understand why you dwell so persistently upon this special day,” his Excellency interrupted him, impatiently.

Again Magnus looked towards the picture of the mother who had been little more than eight months in the grave. “ And who is it ?” he asked, mechanically.

At last the general seemed to comprehend. He changed colour, and his eyes grew haughty and defiant. “ Who is it ? Magnus, you aggravate the difficulties of my position in a way I had not anticipated.

I cannot tell you all on the instant. Heaven knows what might be the consequences for you. You had better come with me, and I will conduct you to her,—let her speak for herself. A ride will refresh your overwrought nerves.” And his Excellency rang and ordered the horses. Then, without another word to his son, he went to his own room.

Here he laid his gloves and riding-whip on the table, and then went to his desk, opened a drawer, and took therefrom two photographs in standing frames. One was a picture of Beatrice Fouquet in a street costume; in the other her head alone had been taken. The pictures had a right now to stand here, and they looked quite in place between the bronze statuettes of the great Frederick and of Marshal Blücher, which adorned the top of the desk. His Excellency stood rapt in contemplation of them, until the servant announced that the horses were ready, and then he sent to tell his son that he was waiting for him.

Treffenbach obeyed the summons like a man in a dream. The announcement had stunned him. He could not grasp its meaning. In vain he tried to convince himself that his father was justified in taking such a step. It seemed to him that the peace of this household, the sacred memory of the departed, was being desecrated, brutally desecrated.

They rode along side by side, and Montrésor curvetted and pranced beneath her rider, friends bowed, and carriages rolled past, but Magnus felt as if his veins were filled with lead.

“Let me say one word in explanation,” the general said, quietly, at last. “Since you have observed nothing, the intelligence must of course have surprised you, and very naturally. You have also heard

nothing of the idle gossip that has been current in the town. There are many ill-natured people, who are only too glad to drag what is noble in the dust just because it stands high, and to destroy what is beautiful just because it is beautiful, and their malicious talk is sure to produce some effect. Therefore I am glad to have you see her first with an entirely unprejudiced mind, which will acknowledge that she upon whom your father proposes to bestow his name is worthy of a still higher position."

"Of course," said Magnus; "can there be any question in the matter?"

"In some minds there is. She brings no coronet, no heraldic device to quarter with our scutcheon, and her social position—— I have received intimations that this marriage would not be regarded favourably by those in authority. My enemies would gladly do me harm. Pshaw! I will forestall them. I had, besides, intended to resign." He said this in a careless tone that was not quite natural. "It will be the easiest way of arranging matters and of putting an end to all manner of difficulties. Ah, here we are in the open country. Let us ride more quickly."

They put spurs to their horses, and rode on under the trees until they drew up before a grated gate, above which a laburnum had been trained into an archway. A short distance behind it was the pretty little villa, half hidden among trees and shrubbery.

The general sprang from the saddle with youthful agility, and a servant made his appearance, opened the grated gate, and took charge of the horses. "Madame is in the drawing-room," he said.

They went into the house. In his intense agitation Treffenbach hardly saw where they were going,

—the house might as well have been a mosque or a mausoleum ; but afterwards, in memory, every trifling object was as if burned in upon his mind,—the idyllic little veranda, the pale blue flowers of the climbing vine, the bright glass in the tall window, the cool, dim hall paved with red and black tiles. They passed on and entered the little drawing-room, where he turned giddy. All the forebodings, all the fears which had sprung to life in his soul, were instantly personified in the woman glowing with Oriental beauty, who rose from her divan with grace and dignity and came towards her visitors, while a strange, harsh voice shrieked from above, ‘ Weleome, Constantin !’

“ Hush, Tom, you chatterer,” the beautiful woman said, with a laugh ; “ it will perhaps sound better if *I* say, ‘ Welcome, Constantin.’ ” And she offered her left hand to the son, while the general bowed low over her right.

“ Yes, Beatrice, my son has come with me. I am sure you will receive him kindly.”

It is impossible fitly to describe the tumult in Trefenbach’s soul. One should know how proud, how stern was that heart, to understand its emotion. One should be aware of all his mother had been to him, to fathom the depth of his misery.

He grew very pale, and in his eyes there flashed such indignant incredulity that Beatrice Fouquet instinctively withdrew her proffered hand. Without a word, he bowed mechanically, then turned and left the room.

“ Magnus !” his father called in tones of thunder. But he did not hear him. He paused on the little veranda and struggled for composure.

Was *that* the woman who was to reign in future in those apartments where the echo of his mother's soft footfall had hardly died away? Was *she* his father's ideal, to whom he was about to sacrifice his profession?

Great drops of moisture stood on his forehead; he leaned against a pillar for support. Only one idea was clear in his mind. He must away, away on the instant from his father's presence, or he should lose all self-control, all sense of what was due to a parent. For a faint, ghostly voice seemed to be calling to him, 'Avenge me!'

His temples throbbed, a red cloud seemed to envelop all around him, when suddenly his agitation gave place to a wonderfully soothing sensation. He dimly perceived an airy apparition standing beside him; he made a mighty effort to collect himself, and he succeeded. The vertigo passed off, he saw everything clearly again, and knew that he was not alone, but that at his side there stood no apparition, but a living being, a lovely, delicate child, slender as a fairy, white and shining as an angel; and as two soft arms were thrown about him, he looked down into eyes sparkling with delight.

"Ah, my brother!" And Violetta Fouquet threw into the words all the enthusiastic tenderness with which an affectionate sister pronounces that name.

Ye heavens above! This too! As if all the powers of hell were combining against him to entangle him in their spells! He thrust away the soft arms, and hurried down the veranda steps and through the little garden. Outside, he swung himself upon his horse and galloped off, he recked not whither. Black care and pain sat in the saddle with him, clutching him

like fierce birds of prey. He could not shake them off, neither could he rid himself of the memory of those clasping arms.

When General von Treffenbach came home that night he learned that his son had been there, and had given directions to Fräulein Emma to send all his books and other effects after him to Velzin.

“Very well,” his Excellency said, indifferently. Then he sat down, and in a firm hand wrote his resignation from the army.

CHAPTER XIII

SEVERED

RAVENHORST was a stately structure; in front of the castle there was a spacious terrace forming a half-circle, shaded by fine old lindens, and surrounded by a low wall, beyond which was a view of extensive meadows set in a frame of woodland. The castle itself laid no claim to architectural beauty, but there was something dignified and venerable in its appearance, like that of some old monastery.

The soil here was more fertile, the landscape lovelier, than at Velzin. True, the eye wandered over limitless plains, but they were cultivated. Fields of waving grain alternated with grassy meadows. Here and there lay a thriving farm. Ravenhorst was noted for the wealth and intelligence of its tenantry.

Upon the terrace in front of the castle Marie Louise

was standing on a morning in May reading a letter, a flush upon her cheek and a frown upon her brow.

The old lindens on this terrace had witnessed the entire life of the young girl; she had grown up beneath their shade. Here as an infant she had been dragged about in her basket-wagon by her nurse, and the baby's large blue eyes had gazed gravely out upon the world. Here she had played with her dolls and learned her lessons; and here she had written Greek and Latin exercises for the Herr Pastor, when in later years she was not content to be taught 'only what girls knew.'

"My dear child," her grandmother called, "what is the matter? You look annoyed."

The old couple were returning from their morning walk about the meadows, where they had been speculating upon the prospects of the approaching hay harvest. It was rarely that Marie Louise seemed ruffled, but here she was with flushed cheeks and an angry look in her eyes.

"If it should be true! It is impossible to know how much importance to attach to Rhona's thoughtless gossip, but she could hardly dare to invent such things."

"My dear, remember I have no idea of what you are talking."

"Why, General Treffenbach is about to marry a dancer!" Marie Louise's eyes flashed. "It is hardly nine months since his wife was buried. He stood by her grave fairly crushed to the earth. He——"

"Good heavens!" the old lady exclaimed in dismay. "It is one of Rhona's ill-timed jests, nothing more, depend upon it."

But Herr von Plattow shook his head. "Let me

tell you," he began, "that the thing does not seem to me so impossible. I have known Constantin Treffenbach now for thirty years, and it would not surprise me. I heard some whisper of his intending to marry when we were in Berlin, but there was no mention of any daneer. The name spoken of was—stop, let me see,—I cannot remember."

"Read the letter," said his wife: "it will explain matters. It cannot be."

"Let me be exact," said the young lady. "Did I say dancer? It is the same thing in my opinion,—an actress is an actress. The person in question is a singer from La Scala, in Milan; that Madame Beatrice Fouquet about whom Rhona raved, and whom we met several times, to my great annoyance. She sang for a season in opera, and her daughter was in the ballet. I confounded the two. A fine kind of step-mother for poor Magnus. It is outrageous, abominable, a burning disgrace!"

"Do not be so agitated. Read your letter to us," her grandmother said, soothingly. "You may have misunderstood it."

"Here is the letter. Pray do not ask me to read it again; I have had more than enough of it!"

She turned away, and gazed abroad over the meadows and woodland basking in the magic light of a May morning. Dew-drops glittered on every blade of grass, and birds twittered in every bush. She had no eyes for all this beauty. Her face was stern and her look gloomy, for there were dark, threatening clouds rising in the clear sky above her future, and they dimmed and shadowed the lovely spring landscape, and filled her with anger and dread.

Meanwhile, her grandmother had sat down on one

of the garden chairs, had put on her spectacles, and unfolding the letter, read it aloud :

“ I have a tremendous piece of news for you, my dear Marie Louise, and am only afraid lest your betrothed has forestalled me. It may be, however, that the composition of a letter which is to impart such tidings to you may cost him more time than it ever takes me to write my nonsense. I shall therefore take your ignorance for granted. Let me tell you, then, that we were yesterday at a garden-party of the Princess Menardi’s. She has lately taken a villa at Potsdam, and is more extraordinary than ever. She had another curiosity there, a crazy Irish baronet, dressed like Cooper’s Leatherstocking, who makes the oddest faces, plays the piano divinely, founds orphan-asylums in secret wherever he goes, and has, she says, a heart of gold, ‘ *un cuore d’oro*. ’ Either the gold or the heart enables him to do a deal of good in the world, so runs the gossip of the day. Well, the old Princess snuffed out this noble creature in Berlin as a well-trained poodle snuffs out truffles among the moss. That graceful simile belongs to my witty friend Lieutenant Schlacken. Now, among other noble acts, this baronet made the fortune of the Beatrice by sending her, when she was a very little girl, to Italy and having her educated for the stage. ‘ What do I care for Beatrice? ’ I hear you ask. My dear, you must accustom yourself to the sound of this name, for you will have to hear it very frequently. The Beatrice was at the garden-party, of course. I repeat what I have told you a hundred times, that if I were a man I should be desperately in love with her. She was more enchanting than ever, and his Excellency your papa-in-law never stirred

from her side. Now, it has been whispered about that he was among her admirers, in fact that he had serious intentions, but on this afternoon every one was astounded. She behaved with distinguished grace, with calm dignity, as if entitled to all that she could receive. That no one can deny. And why should she not? Her reputation is unsullied. She has played her part well. It is, of course, a piece of acting when she undertakes the rôle of a grave, dignified matron, but she does it so charmingly. ‘Ah, she is at home everywhere,’ Peppino (I beg his pardon, Prince Joseph), that *enfant terrible* of forty, said to me. ‘I saw her at Rome during the Carnival, and she was somewhat merrier than she is to-day.’

“Well, after a couple of hours she drove off with her companion. His Excellency handed her to her carriage, and meanwhile everybody looked at everybody else, not knowing what to think. Is there anything more comical than the faces of people who are puzzled what to make of an affair of this kind? I was immensely diverted, and, indeed, it was more than I expected to be, for you know whose absence I deplore! (Little Schlacken was more of a bore than ever, between ourselves. You are right, he is a tiresome chatterer. Is not that what you called him?)

“Well, early this morning we had a visit from papa’s friend, Privy Councillor Finkenberg. ‘Have you heard the news?’ he asked mamma. ‘General Treffenbach is going to marry the Fouquet, and has resigned from the army.’ Of course mamma seemed immensely surprised, although these two possibilities have been talked of for months. At twelve we were honoured by a short visit from the hero of the day himself. He looked superb, but mamma’s

face was quite purple with indignation. He plunged instantly into the midst of affairs, saying that we must be the first to whom he announced his betrothal to Madame Fouquet. In view of the fact that mamma was a Plattow, I vastly admired his touching consideration for her feelings, in informing her before all others that he had quite forgotten his first wife. But I beg a thousand pardons! I always forget that he is your father-in-law. How odd it will seem, dear, to have you here superintending all the benevolent institutions founded by the Consistorial-rath, and making little flannel shirts for the brown Hindoo babies, while your mamma-in-law is singing in 'The Merry Wives'! You two ranged side by side,—the idea is delicious! You must take her in hand, Marie Louise. I am sure she is very impressionable for good influences. You must induce her to brush her hair smooth, and to wear shoes without heels.

"My father is outraged by the affair, and many others share his views. But I must say I think it all delightful. At all events, I want to be the first to tell you of it.

"Always devotedly yours,
"RHONA.

"P.S.—If you should hear that I am betrothed to Schlacken, you will know that it is the result of my despair at the departure of A. v. H.

"Your wretched RHONA."

When Frau von Plattow ended, a long silence ensued. Marie Louise was still standing by the low terrace wall, her hand resting on the marble, her lips compressed, her gaze fixed on space. Her clear-cut

profile stood out like ivory against the blue sky. Frau von Plattow watched her with an anxious air. The old Herr was the first to speak. Clearing his throat, and with a grave shake of the head, he began: "A wretched business! A most undesirable family connection; but there is nothing to be done!"

Marie Louise turned sharply: "And why not?"

"Good heavens! You are betrothed to young Treffenbach. You are bound both by heart and conscience."

"Conscience?" she asked. "My conscience binds me to do what is right. We should cut off the hand that offends us; and if it hurts us,"—she sighed heavily,— "what of that? The greater the pain, the more the necessity, perhaps, for enduring it."

"My dear child," the gentle old Frau began, "you must give the matter the most earnest consideration. I confess that General Treffenbach's conduct offends me deeply, but I admit that we are old-fashioned people and have brought you up with old-fashioned ideas."

"Not so, it seems to me," the old Herr rejoined, with a keen glance towards his grand-daughter; "it certainly was not the fashion in old times to dissolve a betrothal as if it were a dancing engagement."

Marie Louise smiled ironically: "No one has ever yet accused me of levity; you may rest assured that I never act without due consideration. I shall certainly not do so in this case, nor shall I destroy the happiness of my life for my present gratification, or in a moment of temporary excitement."

She turned away, and walked slowly, with head erect, towards the house. "My dear, she is right there," said the old lady, looking up at her husband.

"Let me tell you frankly, my dear Charlotte, what

has been borne in upon me since her betrothal. It was not the result of inclination, but of prudent consideration; perhaps it was a sacrifice made for our sakes. She believed it to be her duty to provide us with a son, and Ravenhorst with an energetic, capable master. Treffenbach was congenial to her, and after due deliberation she accepted his proposal; but she would dissolve the engagement with the same calm composure in view of the slightest obstacle to what she imagines the happiness of her future life, instead of reflecting that it is her duty to share the sorrow and anxiety of the man to whom she has pledged herself."

"I wish you had said all this to her before!" Frau von Plattow exclaimed.

"I fear, my dear Charlotte, that Marie Louise will listen to nothing. She would adduce the most admirable arguments to prove precisely the contrary of my words. She has thought and read and learned so much that she feels herself superior to those about her."

Marie Louise remained shut up in her rooms until noon. When she made her appearance her eyes were red and her cheeks were pale, but she calmly took part in the conversation, and made several inquiries of the secretary and inspector as to matters of business. The housekeeper, too, was glad to accept some advice from her clear-headed young mistress.

And why not? She always knew best. Although she did not attach much importance to such things, and placed her chief interest in matters of spiritual import, she had taken pains to appreciate the practical side of life. Modern views and systems were as familiar to her as to any man, and since she had as yet had no opportunity to put in practice here in Ravenhorst

Her own peculiar schemes for the welfare of mankind, she performed conscientiously the duty that lay next her, and relieved her aged relatives as far as she could of all necessity for exertion.

After dinner Herr von Plattow and his wife always retired to their rooms for an hour's repose. This time Marie Louise was wont to spend in writing letters, for which she had no leisure in the mornings.

In summer her writing-table had its place in the garden hall,—a large arched apartment on the ground-floor, adjoining the dining-room, which served in winter as a conservatory, but was a cool, shady hall in summer. Only a few palms and aloes were left standing here and there in large tubs, and the walls were thickly draped with ivy. The centre of the tiled floor was covered with a rug, where chairs and couches were grouped about a large round table. On pleasant evenings the family collected here about a lamp, and Marie Louise busied herself with ecclesiastical embroidery.

To-day she sat down at her writing-table, but she hesitated long before beginning her letter. From time to time she looked up, as if expecting aid or some interruption. And she was not disappointed. She had not finished her first page before she heard the sound of approaching wheels. She dropped her pen and arose, but she did not go to meet the visitor. If it were *he*, he would know where to find her at this hour.

After some time footsteps slowly coming towards the house were heard upon the gravelled pathway. Magnus Treffenbach walked into the hall, and greeted her with a mute pressure of her hand. His appearance shocked her at first, until she reflected that it was natural that he should look as he did,—distressed, ashy pale, with a feverish glow in his eyes. She

found in his looks only the confirmation of Rhona's intelligence. How could he look well and happy?

"I was just writing to you, my dear Magnus, but it is unnecessary now," she said, with some emotion. "You come from Berlin?"

He tossed his hat upon the table and passed his hand over his forehead. "No, no; let me think. I come from Velzin. My head has grown perfectly worthless. I finally called in a physician, who says I have overtired my brain, and that I must have rest—rest. Yes, a glorious remedy,—easily prescribed, and not to be procured for millions!"

He sat down, and leaned his head upon his hand. Marie Louise looked at him with deep compassion, but it never occurred to her that it might perhaps be her duty to alleviate his suffering by gentle, consoling words. She would have regarded any such as mere idle phrases.

After a pause he looked up and said with effort, but with resolution, "Of course you know everything."

"Yes; I learned it to-day from a letter." Her face flushed. "Be assured, Magnus, that for your poor mother's sake I am beyond measure astounded and indignant. I have no words in which to express my astonishment."

Every one of these well-meant words was like a stab to his morbid consciousness, but he exerted his self-control to the utmost, and began: "Pray let that rest; I cannot yet speak of it. Admit the fact as it is, and let us talk of it only with reference to ourselves. The honour of the Treffenbach name is intrusted for the future to the hands of a frivolous woman. What will she do with it? I do not know, but I am prepared for the worst. Can I expect you

now to assume this name? It may one day receive a stain that nothing can obliterate."

This view of the matter seemed new to her. She had not taken this into consideration, but after some reflection she said, "You are right."

What else could she say? She paid no heed to the fact that he was in a state of morbid nervous tension.

"I expected to hear you say so," he said, and sank into a reverie.

"Yes, Magnus; but I must confess that my thoughts had not yet entered upon that view, long and earnestly as I have reflected. I have had a hard struggle. Let me tell you at what conclusions I have arrived. I never, never could recognize that woman, to say nothing of receiving her beneath my roof. You must be conscious that this would be contrary to my principles, to my whole nature. I never could forget whence she came,—from the boards of a theatre. I should always remember that she had once stood painted on the stage. My resolves once taken are unalterable; I contract no friendship with frivolity, let the world call it by ever so fine a name, let Madame Fouquet be pronounced a queen of art, a divinely gifted creature, and what not besides. I grant that I have no appreciation of art; if I were capable of it I should flee from it as from temptation. Between that woman and myself there must always stand the image of your mother, whose place she exultingly usurps. If I were not your betrothed I should, as a Plattow, feel myself outraged."

He had listened with a strange expression of apathy. Now he said, with evident effort, "But how can you imagine that I should ever allow that woman to cross your path?"

She smiled with some embarrassment: "This is what I wished to tell you. I prophesy that the time will come when, either induced by her arts or by your own heart, you will return to your father's house. Do not deceive yourself. You cannot separate yourself for life from your father. You cannot live at enmity with each other; I have seen that. You are neither of you demonstrative; you are often separated for months at a time, but each must always know of the other's interests, and any continued estrangement between you is impossible. I foresee that you will be reconciled to each other,—nay, do not look so incredulous,—and then what part shall I play? I will tell you frankly: I should then be the obstacle in the way of your reconciliation with your family. Endless misery would be the result. No, Magnus, it could never be. The fair image of my future is blurred and destroyed, and I have suffered profoundly; but ask yourself, what should I do in a family the members of which belonged to the opera and the ballet?"

He groaned as if with physical pain, arose, and paced the hall to and fro.

"Yes, yes, of course," he said. "What could you do there? But what am I saying? Were we not to live here? She never could come here; the thought is misery."

"I know that well," she rejoined. "I know what you feel. But the one consoling thought is that you can now return to your vocation, and still do a great work in the world. I learned much during my stay in Berlin, Magnus. My horizon is broader. As the master of Ravenhorst you might be a very good man, but you could not be a great one. You can do better things than merely relieve my grandparents from care.

I can do that, and what a woman can do is too mean a task for you."

"Possibly," he said, with a sigh. "But you seem so strong and vigorous, Marie. You talk of work as if it were a matter of course. You can hardly understand me when I tell you that I am paralyzed physically and mentally. My very soul cries out for repose"

"Work," she said, calmly; "it is the only cure for misery. Forget yourself in your studies."

"The power of study seems gone."

"But, Magnus, I cannot help you. You must conquer yourself like a man."

"Well, then, let me take the first step now towards self-conquest. Farewell, Marie Louise. It is farewell indeed."

She held out her hand to him, surprised at the indifference of his tone, although intense suffering was stamped in every feature of his pale face.

"Once more, farewell, Marie Louise. I wish you in your future life all the happiness that I am unable to offer you. Tell your grandparents all. Do not ask me to stay. What have I to do among you here? But let us part friends."

She did not ask him to stay. She bade him farewell with a firm voice, and gave him back his troth forever. Forever!

CHAPTER XIV

'BACK TO BUSY LIFE AGAIN'

THE harvest sun lay broad upon the Velzin meadows. It was one of those warm days that come when summer and autumn are striving with each other for the mastery. Millions of purple blossoms on the moor were offering their sweet contents to the bees, that filled the air with their drowsy hum. The old firs bathed their tops in the sunshine and stretched their knotty arms abroad, as if in token of content. The tap of the woodpecker came clear and distinct from the woodland, and the cry of the curlew rang out from above the lake. And here in this solitude, so filled with life, we find Treffenbach again, halting beneath an ancient fir, after a long, warm ride, and dismounting from his horse. This was a level spot, slightly elevated above the surrounding moor, and, casting himself down upon the soft grass, he could, while lying here at full length, overlook a large part of the quiet, wild landscape, and a long stretch of the road running through it towards the west. Judging by his looks continually cast in that direction, he was expecting some arrival.

His horse, the same noble creature which we have seen under the lindens and in the Thiergarten, stood near him, heated and fatigued, with drooping head. From time to time it turned towards its master and licked the hand extended to it. Treffenbach looked hot and tired, but a very different man from the one

who months ago bade Marie Louise farewell. His face, which had then worn the pallor of confinement in a study, was now tanned brown, the features were more strongly marked, the eyes clearer. There were still traces of suffering in his expression, but through them shone the calm that comes after a battle won.

And to-day he could look back upon the summer and review its course comparatively without pain.

Weeks had passed before he had so far recovered as to take interest in life, or to allow his fancy to busy itself with plans for the future. But during this time there was at hand to soothe and aid him a woman whose almost maternal sympathy was always ready, and whose gentle wisdom was intuitive. This was the pastor's wife, Frau Ehrhardt, she whose fine mental qualities and cheerful Christian nature had brought her so near to his mother that the difference in worldly station had been obliterated in their case, and the pastor's wife, with her myriad daily cares, her humble duties, had been the trusted friend of the mistress of Velzin. The knowledge of this friendship made her hand held out to Magnus in his misery a welcome aid.

And she had with rare tact discharged the self-imposed duties of ministering to his physical and mental needs. She had insisted upon his calling in a physician, and had then seen that the dootor's prescriptions were strictly followed. When Treffenbach gradually came to repose such confidence in her as led him to speak to her openly of what distressed him, she wisely tried to turn his thoughts in another direction. As all mental exertion was forbidden him, she interested him in practical matters, and here her husband lent his powerful assistance. Pastor Ehrhardt could

always lure him away from a dull brooding over his wretchedness by interesting talk concerning Velzin affairs. As Treffenbach needed constant exercise, and disliked going out alone, the pastor at first accompanied him in long daily walks through field and forest. Gradually the 'young master' began to be annoyed at their neglected condition, and this annoyance the pastor and his wife hailed as a sign of recovery.

An old forester, living like a mediæval hermit, morose and gray-bearded, in a hut in the forest, now became Treffenbach's daily companion. The good pastor's time would hardly have sufficed to fill that office, for the walks had grown to be long tramps, lasting more than half the day. Magnus returned from them in a state of healthy fatigue, and the sound sleep sure to ensue, and to which he had lately been a stranger, renewed his strength in double measure. He was soon able to study without pain in his head the books which he sent for upon the scientific management of estates, and with a flask of wine and a crust of bread in his wallet, he would sometimes continue abroad in the fields from morning until night.

"You ought to have a riding-horse, Baron Treffenbach," the physician said to him.

He bit his lip, for this suggestion instantly sent his thoughts wandering to what he persistently avoided contemplating. But in a moment he saw the wisdom of the doctor's words, and that very night he wrote to the groom of his father's stables to send him Montrésor with a trusty attendant.

He had then been three months at Velzin, and in all that time had heard nothing from Berlin. He never read the papers, he received no letters, and all communication with Ravenhorst was at an end.

It was, therefore, with some agitation that he sent off this business note, ignorant as he was whether the house in the capital were not closed and the family gone elsewhere. He would have been almost glad to hear that this was so, for it was still torture to him to fancy a Beatrice Fouquet presiding in the rooms which he had once thought were to be always consecrated to the memory of his mother.

Three days later the beautiful brown mare arrived. Treffenbach went to the stables himself while the groom who had brought it was removing the blanket in which it had been carefully wrapped for the exciting journey by railway. The man bowed to the young Baron and delivered his message from the chief groom. Treffenbach was hesitating whether to ask any question that should betray his utter ignorance of his father's whereabouts, when Montrésor recognized him, whinnied, and poked its delicate nose in his pocket as if for sugar.

"Who taught you that accomplishment?" he asked, patting the creature's slender neck. "You did not use to do so."

"He learned that of the young Fräulein," the groom said. "Since the family returned she has ridden the mare every day."

The blood rushed to Treffenbach's face, and the groom, noting his change of expression, added, in a tone which might as well have been the result of simplicity as of malice, "But the Herr Baron need not be afraid that the mare is injured. The Fräulein rides, the chief groom says, like a professional horsewoman."

Treffenbach left the stable with a clouded brow and throbbing temples. It needed a long pacing to and fro in the avenue before he grew calm again. The

twittering of the birds in the boughs overhead sounded in his ears like a silvery ripple of laughter, and the warm wooing wind that breathed about him recalled the clasp of the soft childish arms of her whose existence he had not deemed worth a thought, and who had been so bitterly avenged.

Still in a gloomy mood, he walked to the parsonage, where, in the summer-house beneath the walnut at the foot of the garden, he found Frau Ehrhardt busy with a heaped-up work-basket on the table before her, superintending Hanna's knitting and hearing the lessons of the little ones. They were sent to play for a while when the mother saw the Herr Baron approaching with a cloud upon his brow; and after he had taken his seat upon a bench opposite her she asked, anxiously, "What is the matter?"

"Nothing. My horse has arrived."

"And—you have news?"

"No; only that that ballet-girl has ridden my mare every day,—and as skilfully," he added, bitterly, "as a professional horsewoman. Very pleasant for me."

"I should like, my dear Herr Baron," Frau Ehrhardt said, after some reflection, "to speak a word to you on this subject. I have hitherto avoided doing so, because I shrank from touching an open wound. You know how deeply I deplore this marriage; you know that I share your opinion with regard to it, and it may surprise you that I can find one word to say in that young girl's behalf, but we must not utterly condemn her without some knowledge of her."

"That knowledge I have. I saw her upon the stage; I saw her picture in every shop-window; I heard her name upon every idle coxcomb's lips. Pah!"

"Poor child; only fifteen years old, and absolutely

governed by a mother who saw no better career for her daughter than one similar to her own!"

"A child already skilled in the arts by which men's heads are turned."

"Perhaps; but let me tell you what I know of Violetta Fouquet. Ah, Herr Baron, you are surprised, and no wonder, that the wife of the pastor of a village so remote from the capital as Velzin should have any knowledge of one who is in your mind a creature existing only for the dazzle and glitter of a frivolous society. But in the quietest part of Berlin there is a modest little dwelling, where an old friend of mine—a poor widow now—has been placed in charge of some little orphan children from the lowest classes of the people. An eccentric Irish baronet, the early benefactor of the singer who is Violetta's mother, has done this thing, for what? To gratify not only his own kind heart, but also the child of whom we are talking. I have always kept up my correspondence with Frau Forstmann, and from her I hear of Violetta Fouquet,—not of her art in turning men's heads, but of her tender thought of others, of her sympathy with the lowest of God's creatures. Ah, I assure you, my poor friend grows eloquent in her praise, and therefore I have a request to make of you,—one that I have deeply at heart."

"What is it?" he said, the sarcastic expression on his face giving place to surprise and a half-incredulous sympathy.

"If at any future time you should meet this young creature, do not be hard upon her, do not judge her without knowing her; try to be, I do not say a brother to her, but a friend. Forgive me for speaking thus to you, but I am older than you, and I have had

many trials and have thought much. God make us all merciful as we hope for mercy! Have patience with Violetta if you ever see her again."

"I promise you," he said, much moved by her earnest words. "I thank you for appealing to my better self. If this child is what you describe, and if fate ever brings us together, I will do my duty; and however strict I may be, I will not be harsh, and will try to keep only her good in view."

From that day Treffenbach's thoughts of his unwelcome young step-sister grew more kindly, and although his pain in thinking of the home that he had lost was no less, and his opinion of Beatrice Fouquet unchanged, he could contemplate more calmly the existing state of affairs. A longing to see his father again, to know that there was peace between them, began to stir within him, although this took no shape in any resolve.

He wondered now at the indifference with which he had resigned his claim to the hand of Marie Louise. How could it be? He could not so easily relinquish the idea that had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength. Therefore he had written her a long explanatory letter, which he had despatched by a special messenger to Ravenhorst, and watching for the return of this messenger, he lay here on this autumn day on the heather beneath the old fir.

Yes, there he came. Treffenbach arose and walked towards the man, leading his horse by the bridle.

The letter that he should thus receive would decide his future life. If it contained a 'no' he should in a few weeks either return to St. Petersburg or depart for some foreign country.

The letter was very brief, and ran thus: "I am amazed at the speedy fulfilment of my prophecy, for from your letter I gather that your sentiments with regard to that person are already undergoing some modification. I do not change. Have you forgotten your mother? I have not! I never, never can be yours,

"MARIE LOUISE."

A few weeks afterwards the Velzin manor-house was again untenanted. The young Baron was travelling. The government had given him a position in an Asiatic expedition which had just been fitted out, and his scientific researches would probably be very interesting. Science must console him for all that he had lost.

CHAPTER XV

TWO YEARS LATER

JUST two years had passed since that morning when Fräulein Emma had wreathed the portraits in the drawing-room with garlands because it was the 'wedding-day.'

In spite of the changes that had taken place, Fräulein Emma had remained faithfully at her post, like a devoted cat. She had witnessed with sighs and tears the instalment of the new mistress, and had been retained like some indispensable article of furniture.

Thus she sat this morning in the breakfast-room, behind the same coffee-urn, and the sun shone on the old coat of arms on the wall, and upon the tawny hide of a huge mastiff stretched in lazy length upon the floor. But the doors into the drawing-room were closed, for Madame did not like to have the aroma of the coffee, or perchance the odour of a fine Havana, interfere with the perfumed atmosphere of her special room. The round clock in the wainscoting struck eight; Fräulein Emma cleared her throat, sighed, and laid aside her knitting: the general would enter shortly.

“Thirty years!” She reckoned them up to herself, but she had put no wreaths around the old portraits, nor had she tied a new lace kerchief about her still swollen face. She had contented herself with exchanging a significant glance with Friedrich, now become a finely-polished jewel.

The door opened, and the general appeared, as erect and imposing in carriage as ever, it seemed at the first glance,—and yet he was changed.

The commander had become an idle looker-on,—a great change, and one that affects the deepest springs of life. Energy, action, capacity, and the armed hand, all lying unused, like dead capital. Daily occupation is lacking,—the one great interest that fills up existence and lends it a value, urging on to new goals as soon as the old ones are attained.

What is he now? Merely the bearer of a title, a man whose life is already only a memory. Ah, this makes the hair gray, and brings on that nervous irritability which, in default of greater annoyances, will fret at the motes in the sunbeam. Formerly the general had given no thought to his health; he had had

neither time nor interest for little ailments that were now thought of importance, and brought forward to a degree that caused people to remark that since General Treffenbach had resigned from the army he had grown old and ailing.

As he sat down at the breakfast-table and spread his napkin on his knees, he looked rather ill-humoured. "My step-daughter not yet down?" he asked, glancing at the clock. "Only half a cup, Emma, if you please. The gout is flying about me everywhere this morning. My right arm is absolutely stiff. Which way is the wind? East? I thought so. Ah, mouse, here you are. I have been waiting half an hour for the Princess Sleepy-head."

For Violetta Fouquet had tripped into the room, bright and lovely, a very embodiment of the sunny morning.

"No, no, papa dear," she said, stooping to kiss his hand; "not more than five minutes at most. Eh, Fräulein Emma? But I am charmed to know that it seemed so long to you."

He smiled, and she pushed her chair nearer to his, so that while with her right hand she heaped her cup of coffee with sugar, she leaned her left elbow upon the arm of his chair and looked up at him inquiringly. "More pain, papa?" she asked, gently.

"Oh, I feel like a beaten dog this morning."

She took his hand in both hers: "What did the doctor say last evening?"

"What they all say,—Teplitz."

"Then we are going to Teplitz, are we not?"

"Drink your coffee, mouse, and don't tease me with questions."

"You are going to Teplitz, and I am going with

you, and mamma will go to Venice with the Menardis," Violetta insisted.

"We'll see, we'll see. Both might be too much for the purse."

He tried to speak jestingly, but the attempt was hardly successful.

"Then mamma must really give up her journey, eh? It must not be like last summer."

"How was it last summer?"

"When we were in Scotland, and mamma fell into the lake as we were landing, and you pulled her out—"

"What? Ought I to have let her drown?"

"Oh, I don't mean that; but when you had so much pain in consequence, and the doctors all ordered the baths, my mother would not give up Paris, and you laughed at the doctors. Ah!"—and the girl clasped her hands,—“it is terrible to have such wilful parents; is it not, Fräulein Emma? This year the doctor's prescription must be followed."

"Drink your coffee, mouse, and then come and write a couple of letters for me,—my right hand is good for nothing,—and after that we will have a ride."

He took up the daily paper and began to read it, but soon tossed the large sheet aside with an impatient exclamation. "Where is the 'Weekly Gazette'? It must have come to-day!"

Violetta sprang up and brought him a tiny sheet from a table near the door. "Here it is. Friedrich has been reading it again on the sly, and has left it there. Now let us see!"

And General Treffenbach's lovely step-daughter unfolded the modest journal, the organ of a remote, secluded quarter of the Margraviate.

Since January the general had been taking this journal, of the existence of which he had not previously been aware, and had read it with the greatest eagerness from beginning to end, although always laying it aside with a disappointed air. To-day, however, Fräulein Emma, who was naturally timid, was startled by a loud exclamation of surprise from the pair, and then Violetta read out in an undertone, "We hear that Baron Magnus Treffenbach, who returned to us last January from St. Petersburg, takes his departure this month for Rio de Janeiro, where he is to be Secretary of Legation. We regret this extremely. Such a man should remain in our country. The lecture delivered by him lately in our Town Hall upon Indian Missions showed him to be a finished orator. His political views, his ready benevolence, and his force of character are well known. He certainly will not lack votes at our next election."

There was a pause. The general rubbed his forehead. "In the course of this month? What month is this?"

"It is May, papa."

"Ah, of course, of course. Well, never mind that, Violetta; I must go to my letters."

She ran with him, hanging on his arm and looking up in his face. "Brazil, Brazil! Is not that very far, and rather unhealthy?"

"Yes, yes." His face had grown gray and gloomy. They went to his study; the young girl sat down at the writing-table and dipped her pen in the ink, while the general walked to and fro.

"There was a letter to be written to a horse-dealer," Violetta said at last, timidly, as if to remind him of their purpose in coming here. Then she drew a mul-

titude of cherubs' heads upon her blotter. Still the general continued to pace to and fro and said nothing. Suddenly he sank heavily into an arm-chair and covered his eyes with his hand. In an instant the girl was on her knees beside him, with her arm about his neck. "We will write to him, papa," she whispered in his ear.

He sighed, with an expression of intense melancholy. "Shall we write to him? But what shall we say?"

"That he must come to you. Yes, before he goes to Brazil."

"Go and write, then."

"Oh, no; not I, not I. You must do that." She pushed paper and pen towards him, and he began the letter, but his hand trembled, and the writing was illegible.

"You see, child, it will not do."

"Oh, it must; only try. There, that is beautiful! 'My dear son.' Now go on."

"But what shall I say?"

Violetta propped her chin upon her clasped hands and gazed up at the ceiling. "Oh, I know. He must come to Teplitz. There you will be alone,—that is, I shall be there,—but I am the same as no one to him." She spoke the last words with a somewhat disdainful air of pique and with head erect.

If there were a person in the world whom Violetta Fouquet hoped never to see again, it was Magnus Trefenbaeh. He was the only human being who had ever rudely repulsed her, the only man of whom she was afraid. But all that was of no consequence now.

The general wrote on with difficulty, but without pause. When he had finished he looked up: "I hope he'll come."

“He must come.”

“Now, then, I will go to mamma. No more letters to-day, little one. Does not your singing-master come? When he goes we'll have our ride.”

And, as if invigorated, he arose and left the room with a more elastic step and more of his old martial bearing. His beautiful wife must not see that grief for the loss of his son was gnawing at his heart, and that care, care of the most prosaic kind, was making an old man of him.

The Baroness Treffenbach was still in her boudoir, reclining upon her divan, occupied partly with a cup of chocolate, partly with a huge box filled with patterns of rich stuffs. Charlie was growling under a chair, and Tom was fidgeting on his perch, but Madame Morton's gray-clad form was no longer to be seen. There is no longer any necessity for her ministrations, and she has vanished, has departed to keep house for an invalid old Graf.

Beatrice looked up as her husband entered, and held out to him her hand, which he pressed to his lips after true knightly fashion. She looked rather weary, perhaps only bored, but always beautiful.

“Good-morning, *mon ami*. You have finished your correspondence early, and so find me still in my morning-wrapper. Look here, only the other day some one said that gold, shot with blue, would be very becoming to me, and here I have just received it as a novelty from Paris.” She yawned. “Beautiful weather. I am going to drive out. And you?”

“I am at your disposal. But you do not look well, Beatrice. What is it?”

“Ennui,” was the prompt, smiling reply; “and indeed I might return the compliment. We are both

growing old, it seems to me. They grow old fearfully early in your country."

"Not so early as in Italy, I think."

"Oh, I did not mean that. I meant you of the aristocracy. It is the dull life you lead. Do you not think so?" She looked at him thoughtfully. "I have been puzzling myself over it for the last half-hour. What is our life? Rise in the morning, write notes, have a consultation with the housekeeper, a visit from one's milliner, then lunch, calls, dinner, a little music, tea, and the day is over."

"And what else would you have?"

"Can you ask? Change of scene, new faces, new scores, new stages; in short, never to know one day what the next will be like. That is life! But here we know exactly—good heavens!—twenty years beforehand. Death and birth are the only changes in this existence."

She did not speak complainingly, but with a certain amount of humour. Then she clasped her hands like a pleading child. "Grant a grace, dear friend. Let us go to Naples."

"Now, in spring?"

"What of that? The Menardis have a villa at Sorrento."

"The Hofrath insists that I must go to Teplitz."

"In—deed? Well?"

"Well?"

"Do you expect me to play the good wife and go to Teplitz and wrap you in flannel when you come out of the baths?"

"Suppose I were to say 'yes'?"

"Heavens above!" The Beatrice sank back among her cushions as if annihilated. The general looked

away, but she saw that he was hurt. ‘Constantin!’ she said, gently, and the parrot repeated after her, ‘Constantin!’

The general made a motion as if to sweep the insolent creature from its perch ; Beatrice put out her hand as if to prevent the attack, and laughed archly. “Tell the truth, Constantin ; you turn to the bird, but you mean me. Now let me tell you frankly, you ask too little of me ; that is it, I cannot condescend to such trifles. Demand of me something grand and unusual, and you shall be gratified. Tell me that circumstances compel you to go among wild Indians, and I will share your wigwam. Reveal to me that you are condemned to the galleys, and I will be chained to the oar beside you. If your life depended upon my death, I could plunge the dagger into my heart in the fervour of my devotion. Ah, you do not know me yet. I am capable of an heroic act, believe me ; but to regulate the temperature of a bath with a thermometer for eight long weeks, and to keep a record of the progress of the cure of my husband’s rheumatism,—where is there room for heroism in that ? Besides, I always become ill myself when I see sick people, and that wretched Tep-litz is swarming with miserable objects, pushed about in invalid-chairs or hobbling along on crutches. Ah, my dear husband, have pity upon the nerves of a woman who suffers more than she ever confesses !”

“I see that you are not well and need some change,” he said, half conquered, for those eyes and that smile had not yet lost their charm for him.

“Now you are delightful. In two weeks the Menardis are going. Let us all go to Teplitz together, and I will gladly pass a few days there with you. Then I will take Violetta and go on to Vienna and Venice.”

"Violetta says she wishes to stay with me."

"The little goose tells a fib. She is wild to go to Venice; she told me so a day or two ago."

"Well, we will see." He rose, and then said, with hesitation, "It will be an expensive summer,—Teplitz, Venice, probably Milan?"

"No, Naples," she said, quietly.

"But, Beatrice, our income—"

"Now you are talking just as the husbands do in novels," she laughed. "Go and grumble elsewhere; I am going to have my hair dressed."

He went with a profound sigh, and all the wrinkles that the sight of his beautiful wife had smoothed away from his face appeared there again.

Violetta was seated at the piano in the drawing-room, singing. She took daily lessons now of the best masters, and, as there was no fear of the stage any longer, these lessons were her greatest delight, for song was as native to her as to a bird. It was strange, and a great pity, that her mother since she had left the stage could not bear to hear any music. It was sure to give her headache. Violetta had, however, an enthusiastic auditor in the general, who, when he heard the sweet, long-drawn notes, was sure to come into the next room with his papers. He understood little of music, but he delighted in the growing force and volume of this fresh young voice, and was never tired of expressing this delight. Listening to the joyous notes he forgot his anxieties. And his Excellency had anxieties, anxieties of the most prosaic kind, and heart-troubles besides.

What? Had the Beatrice disappointed him? Had the woman for whom he had sacrificed everything proved to be only a beautiful mask? Oh, no! oh, no!

She was still the same, and his pride in her was as great as ever. With what perfect self-poise she had taken her place as mistress of his house, and how thoroughly she had asserted her position in society! Her little dinners, suppers, and assemblies were famous. To be sure, she needed a French cook for these entertainments, and a new toilette for every evening. But he liked to keep open house, and to fill his life with social engagements which indemnified him somewhat for the position he had resigned. The former gentle mistress of his household had scarcely been of sufficient personal distinction, at least thus the general was ungrateful enough to think, now that there stood beside him a woman whose personal endowments matched his own,—a woman formed to lead in society.

Malicious people hinted that the present married life of General Treffenbach was full of stormy scenes, and that he had long since repented his hasty step. But these kind friends, among whom were the Bellwitzes, were mistaken. There were no scenes in the Treffenbach household. The relations of his Excellency with his lovely wife were unchanged. She knew now as well as ever how to enchain and bewitch him, and she was almost always amiable. She sometimes yawned a little, but she could yawn gracefully. She might often be tired, but she was never tiresome. She was now and then capricious and exacting, but with a certain waywardness that charmed him while he remonstrated. She was sometimes refractory, but she had a way of begging for forgiveness and of bowing beneath his displeasure that disarmed him. She never told him that she loved him, but she always made him believe that she did. She never forgot herself before the world. Magnus Treffenbach would

have felt less harshly towards her could he have known with what absolute self-possession she played 'her Excellency.' That the part began to bore her intensely had no effect upon her resolve to carry it through brilliantly, for whatever character Beatrice Fouquet undertook to perform, she played conscientiously, identifying herself with it in a fashion that had exalted her above other artists of her day, and had enabled her always to produce a harmonious whole.

No, she had not disappointed his expectations; she had even exceeded them in certain regards, and here we come to the truth of the matter, to the cause of his grizzling hair and his anxious look. He had foreseen that to marry Madame Fouquet would be an expensive pleasure. He had even been prepared to pay her debts, for it was notorious that, in spite of her princely income, her finances were always in disorder. He was also aware that it would require his entire yearly income to live in a manner suitable to his rank. But he had no conception of the claims that could be made upon life by a woman accustomed to a degree of luxury which might be termed regal.

How could he know this? Frau Louise, the wealthy heiress, had not taught him, and he had formed his ideas of such claims upon the sum required by her for her dress and her summer excursions.

Now he knew better, and it was this knowledge that was turning his hair gray, for he saw himself upon the brink of an abyss.

CHAPTER XVI

TEPLITZ

“It is a Russian prince with his family,” said the loungers on the road between Schönau and Teplitz, as they sauntered along after the bathing-hour, to amuse themselves with a sight of the passing equipages and the toilettes of their fair occupants.

“Oh, no; you will see in the hotel books to-morrow that it is a millionaire from Paris, with a wife from California who owns an inexhaustible gold-mine.” And the speaker turned to greet a friend who was approaching. “Yes, my dear Count, you will see that those two ladies will be the reigning beauties of the season.”

An open carriage rolled by, and the Count, with an exclamation of surprise, pulled off his hat. “The Trefenbachs!” he said.

“What? you know them? Come, this is interesting. Who are they, Count Hess?”

“General Treffenbach, with his wife and step-daughter. Of course I know them. I must go immediately and see where they are staying.”

He took leave of the others and walked off rapidly.

Treffenbach! He had heard the name seldom enough during the last two years. His correspondence with Magnus Treffenbach had ceased long since; he only knew that Magnus had been travelling and had then returned to St. Petersburg. And was he married? No intelligence to that effect had reached Brussels, but it would have cost Hess very little trouble to find out if it

were so. He had not tried to find out. He took for granted that the marriage had taken place ; it was the most sensible thing to be done,—oh, yes, desperately sensible. Of course he had heard of General Treffenbach's marriage. That was an affair discussed, condemned, excused, justified, far and wide. Hess himself had wasted but few words upon it; it did not interest him much.

At last he discovered the villa in which the guests in question from Berlin had been established for three days. It was rather secluded, nestling picturesquely among green trees, and behind it rose the wooded slope of the mountains. The first thing that he saw was Fräulein Emma's face at the window. It looked melancholy, and the ends of the kerchief knotted above her head stood out like two ears. She recognized him, and her air grew more cheerful as she opened the door for him herself.

“Ah, who would have thought of seeing you, Herr Count! Pray come in. No one is at home at present, but they will soon return. Ah, Herr Count, they ought to have left me in Berlin ; this is no place for me, and what is to become of the household at home, and that cook, there's no knowing.”

“You must tell me all about everything,” he said. “So the general is here with the ladies?”

“Yes, yes ; her Excellency is going to Venice from here, but Fräulein Violetta wants to stay with her papa, and I am to stay with her. This is a horrible place,—very different from Berlin. That I call a city indeed ; but this hole ! I cannot admire it, for all that Prince Barancovich praises up Teplitz so.”

“Stay ; who is Prince Barancovich ?”

“Oh, good heavens, Herr Count ! he's what you

might call a Croatian magnate. He always drives four-in-hand, and behaves as if he had seen all the world ; but he's seen it to no purpose if he thinks so much of Teplitz. To compare it with Berlin ! And they know nothing whatever of cooking here, either!"

Fräulein Emma's tone of voice grew more and more pathetic, and Hess looked around the room to conceal a smile. It was a pretty little drawing-room. Near a window stood a writing-table, and upon it lay a pink muslin hat. "Has Fräulein Violetta turned author?" he asked, to divert the current of her doleful reflections.

"Oh, no, but she writes everything for the general, who cannot use his right hand very well. Indeed, Herr Count, she is a good child ; a little flighty perhaps, but a heart of gold, and to his Excellency she is devoted. Ah, in the old times——"

"Are the Menardis here?" he interrupted.

"Oh, yes. Her Excellency leaves with them this evening. There is a whole party ; a daughter of the Princess, a Countess Sala Selvaggio, with her husband, is with them too. He lives in Venice. Ah, all new names, new times! In old times"—Fräulein Emma here put her handkerchief to her eyes—"no one would have dared to compare Teplitz with Berlin."

"Fräulein Emma, you never sent me the picture you promised me." Something must be done to dispel the good soul's melancholy, and this had the desired effect.

"Ah, Herr Count, my face is still a little swollen, but the doctor says it will soon be all right, and then I am certainly going to the photographer's."

"Remember, I am to have the first likeness that is taken. I have waited patiently now for years, and I

deserve a reward. One more question. What do you hear from Baron Magnus?"

"Almost nothing. Ah, he has not been near us for two years; but that's no wonder. How can he come when he thinks of her who is gone? Oh, it was enough to break one's heart when his Excellency announced that he was going to marry again! Those were the darkest days of my life."

"Yes, yes; but where is he now?"

"In Velzin. We saw that in the 'Gazette.'"

"Have they—have they any children?"

"Who?" exclaimed the Fräulein, her long face growing longer than ever.

"Why, Magnus and the Baroness Marie Louise."

"Good heavens, no! But if they had been married they might have had some."

"Then they are not married?" He asked no more questions, but became silent and thoughtful. In fancy, surrounded as it were by a halo, he saw a proud, delicate face, crowned by a diadem of gleaming gold, white as a lily and cold as marble; a face which had puzzled, attracted, and repelled him; a face which he had tried to banish from his dreams, which, with its crystal clear blue eyes, had made his heart beat wildly more than once, and which he remembered with mingled indignation and longing.

Fräulein Emma went on to explain: "Fräulein Marie Louise could not make up her mind to marry our Baron because of Madame Fouquet, you see."

"Of course," he exclaimed, rousing as if from a dream. "I might have known that; it was perfectly logical. Just like her. And now, Fräulein Emma, I must go. My regards to their Excellencies and to Fräulein Violetta, and tell them that I am on a visit

to my parents, who have come here for my mother's health. I shall call again."

He went out, and on the road before the house joined a lady who was being pushed in a rolling-chair, beside which walked an elderly gentleman of military carriage. "Who lives in that villa that you came from just now, Armin?" asked the lady.

"The retired General Treffenbach."

"The one who married the singer? Is she *comme il faut*?"

"As any princess."

"A very disagreeable affair, however. I really do not know whether to know these people or not."

"Dear mother," he said, smiling, "Madame Beatrice has probably considered the same question with regard to us, and decided it, too, against us, for she leaves for Venice this evening."

"That's well," the invalid lady rejoined, fanning herself.

The next day Hess met the general going from the baths towards his home. It struck the Count that he was changed, and did not carry himself quite so proudly as formerly. He shook Hess warmly by the hand, and instantly asked if he had heard lately from Magnus, adding with assumed ease, "We are expecting the fellow daily. Heaven knows what is keeping him."

"What does he write?"

"Oh, he has not written exactly, and that is why we cannot help thinking he is coming."

They had reached the villa, where a window was opened, and a lovely face, with beaming eyes, looked out. "No letter! Poor papa! But who is with you? It is Count Hess! See what a good memory I have!"

In a few days 'the little Fouquet' was the acknowledged queen of the youthful society of the watering-place. Various merry young lieutenants on leave were at her feet, as was also Prince Branco Baran-covich, an amiable bachelor, who made all the roads unsafe with his four-in-hand, and placed all his horses at the young lady's disposal. So, as a certain Countess Doris, a very lovely woman, and an enthusiastic horsewoman, had taken Violetta under her special protection, there were many riding-parties, at which Count Hess made one, to the great anxiety of his mother, who was always in dread lest Armin should make 'some stupid marriage.'

One day when the general, whose use of the waters was conscientious to a fault, came home from the baths, to find his step-daughter watching for him as usual at the window, she called out to him, "Oh, papa, just think! the Countess Doris has sent you a magnificent rose-bush!"

At first he started; involuntarily his step grew quicker, his face brighter, but at her closing words a shade of disappointment passed over his features. "Oh! I thought you had a letter."

Violetta came flying like a fawn out of the house, and threw herself into his arms. "You thought, papa? Oh, I am so sorry I disappointed you!" And the tears rushed to her eyes.

"Never mind, mouse," he said, as they entered the drawing-room. "What if we were to write again?"

She looked at him with unutterable compassion in her eyes. How much those words must have cost the proud man who, two years before, when his wrath was hot and his bliss at its height, had replied to a letter from his son by a haughty repulse!

"Your letter must have been lost, papa!" She did not believe this any more than did he, but there was consolation in the supposition.

"Come," said the girl, closing the window and placing an arm-chair for him. "Make yourself comfortable, papa, and I will order breakfast, and then we will write."

The sunshine stole into the room through the green Venetian blinds, filling it with a peculiar resplendence. A ray hovered among Violetta's dark curls, tinging them with rich, golden hues. Her lovely face spoke comfort even when her lips uttered no words, and as he looked at her with a sigh, his Excellency's eyes grew moist. "My child!" he said, holding out his hand to her. The airy figure bent over him,—the girl took his hand and carried it to her lips with a mixture of respect and tenderness.

There were times when he entirely forgot that Violetta was not his own daughter. He had once had a daughter, long years ago, who had died a very little child, and the pain of whose loss he had never forgotten, for his tenderness for her had been great. She had been permitted to do many things denied to her brother,—she could come to her father's room at any time, however occupied he might be, and claim her place upon his knee. She had been christened Louise, after her mother, but he had nicknamed her mouse, she was so tiny, so quiet. For five years this little creature was 'papa's mouse,' and then the chill November wind, bringing diphtheria on its wings, nipped the tender blossom.

The void left by her death was never filled for him. For years he never sat at his writing-table or drank his early cup of coffee without a sense of loss, which

he hardly understood until Violetta Fouquet came to show him what he had lacked. She had gradually taken the vacant place in his heart, and he had begun to mingle the two individualities, and to fancy at times that his daughter had grown up. He might hide his anxieties from the world and from his idolized wife, but Violetta read them all in his eyes.

Suddenly Fräulein Emma appeared at the door, her face bathed in tears. "The Herr Secretary is come!" she said, with a sob.

"What?" shouted his Excellency, springing up. Violetta threw down the pen, her face filled with terror. "Papa," she whispered hurriedly, "I—I am going to the Countess Doris!" And instantly she disappeared through a door at the back of the room. The general scarcely heard her words, for his son stood before him. It was hard work for him to master his agitation, as he tried in vain to say in the old tone, "At last, old fellow! God bless you! I have been really anxious about you!" Then they clasped hands, and as they looked in each other's eyes the father felt young again.

"I only got your letter, sir, the day before yesterday," Magnus said at last, "for I was in Berlin, where I went to our house," he hastened to say, "but missed you by an hour only."

"Indeed! And you found my letter when you got back to Velzin? What were you doing in Berlin?"

"They have offered me a position in the embassy to Rio."

"That report is true, then!" And a cloud passed over the general's face. "A terrible distance, my boy, after not having seen each other for two years. 'Tis not pleasant to think of."

"There is plenty of time given me for consideration, sir. We'll not think of it at present."

And then they sat and talked as they had done in the old times, and the hour glided by they knew not how. The general was gay and animated, Magnus quiet and grave. The event that had so disturbed the peace of his existence still cast its shadow over him; his views were, as his father soon perceived, scarcely modified, but the irrepressible longing to be once more with the father who had been everything to him had for the time thrust all other considerations into the background. He meant to enjoy this meeting let the consequences be what they might. They both avoided as far as possible any reference to painful subjects, until the general saw fit at the close of their long talk to say, "And now, Magnus, before she returns, I should like to know what reception you mean to give to your step-sister?"

"I think you will be satisfied with me, sir," his son replied, after an instant's reflection.

"That's right!" the general exclaimed, greatly relieved. "Wherever she may be gone, she cannot be long away. We have an engagement at one, to lunch with some acquaintances *al fresco*. 'Tis a great bore on this special day. What is to be done?"

"I will go with you, of course; but I must first go to the hotel and change my travelling-dress."

"Be here again at one," his father called after him as he left the house.

When Baron Magnus returned, punctually at the appointed time, there was no one in the drawing-room. His Excellency, so said Friedrich, was dressing. He sat down, and was turning over the leaves of some books, when suddenly the door opened, and he saw upon the

threshold the childlike form of the young girl with whom he had promised to have patience.

She hesitated to advance, and curtsied with a mingling of timidity and dignity.

"Good-morning, Violetta," he said, holding out his hand with somewhat stiff courtesy.

"Good-morning," she rejoined, in a low voice. Then, as he approached her, she stammered something about having forgotten her gloves, and left him alone again.

Immediately afterwards the general appeared, having made his toilette with all his wonted elegance. "Well? Where is mouse?" he asked. "Have you seen her?"

"Only for a moment. She left the room immediately."

She soon returned with Fräulein Emma, and the party set out. Magnus tried several times during their walk to engage Violetta in conversation, but she evidently avoided him; her large eyes gazed at him with fear and dislike. She was silent, and he could extort from her only monosyllabic replies.

The appointed place of meeting was a charming garden beneath the shade of huge lindens, where there were set out two tables,—one for the elder members of the party and the other for the young people. Here Treffenbach was greeted with enthusiasm by his friend Armin, and was presented to the other members of the gay circle, among whom Violetta moved with the careless ease of a bird. He could now begin his study of her character, and he did so with earnest gravity. She had scarcely replied to his remarks, but here she was the centre of admiration. Her silvery laughter harmonized with the distant music, except that it was more bewitching than Strauss's waltzes.

She had contrived, he saw clearly, to have her seat as far from him as possible, but it was not on the same side of the table. They sat opposite each other at either end, and on her right and left glittered the gay uniforms of a couple of cavalry officers. The other ladies were two genial Countesses from Vienna, and two fiery little Parisians, the daughters of a French colonel whom wounds received in the last war had sent hither for several seasons, and who, laying aside all national hostility, had made friends with General von Treffenbach. The two men, deeply interested in the leading scientific topics of the day, avoided polities, but after lunch discussed various battles with the aid of toothpicks placed in position on the table-cloth. Violetta seemed greatly pleased with the little brunettes Aimée and Hortense. Then there was the Countess Doris, with her husband, the latter a rather insignificant scion of the aristocracy.

Among all these people Violetta's pre-eminence seemed established without any effort, almost without any consciousness, of her own. Various plans for future excursions were discussed; the question to be settled seeming always to be whether Fräulein Fouquet had seen this or that point of interest, whether she approved, and whether she preferred to drive, to ride, or to walk.

"Let us ride!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Oh, where is Prince Baranovich? Why is he not here? Ah, there he is at the other table, Lieutenant Cserny. Can you not make him just the slightest sign to come to us? He must hear this plan. He is so kind and will give us the horses."

"The slightest sign! Not needed, Fräulein Violetta. There he comes. He has only been waiting to have

you deign to glance towards him. You are insatiable!" Count Hess spoke with great gravity, and by the help of his melancholy moustache contrived to gaze reproachfully at her, before glancing, his blue eyes sparkling with merriment, at Magnus, whose air was gravely judicial. "Here," he went on,—"here is Prince Branco. Was it not enough to have us all at your feet, and must you deprive that fair widow, Frau von Kormany, at the other table, of the consolation of her old age?"

But Violetta replied only by a preoccupied smile. Her whole attention was given to the proposed excursion, and nothing could be more joyous and free from all affectation than her thanks to Prince Branco for his ready concurrence in the proposed plan.

At last the assemblage broke up; the general was impatient to go home to be alone with his son, and Violetta readily accepted an invitation from the colonel's daughters to spend the afternoon with them.

When she came home with Fräulein Emma at six o'clock, she slipped noiselessly into the drawing-room, where the general sat smoking a cigar and drumming a march with his fingers on the arm of his chair. She did not perceive his son, who stood at a window, looking out. Supposing his Excellency to be alone, she ran up to him and threw her arms about him, exclaiming, "Oh, papa, I am so happy for you! It will do you more good than all the baths in the world!"

Magnus turned from the window, and could see the crimson that flushed her cheek as, becoming aware of his presence, she hurried out of the room. This little interlude reconciled him to her again. He had watched her with scarcely-concealed contempt during the lunch;

but she seemed to be tender and kind to his father. It was a good trait, something upon which to found the training which he was now quite resolved to undertake. Yes, she was a butterfly, a will-o'-the-wisp, but the wandering gleam might in time become a pure, steady flame.

Fine schemes, but very difficult to carry out, for Violetta, cheerful and easy with every one else, could not conquer her dread of him. He must tame her as one tames a shy bird,—not an easy task. This week was a whirl of entertainments. Even the general, roused to new energy, took part in them, forgetting his pains. The usual excursions were soon exhausted; more distant estates were visited, and new acquaintances were formed; there were dinners, suppers, and dances. When Magnus addressed Violetta, she would look round with an anxious air as if for release, and once she greeted the approach of Count Hess with such joy, that if Armin had been a coxcomb he might have drawn inferences very flattering to his vanity. She managed to have appointments with friends when Magnus came to his father. He was obliged, indeed, to have patience with her, but in a different way from any that he had imagined. He knew now that she could not forget his repulse of her, and that it would cost him infinite pains to obliterate that impression. But he remembered his promise and bided his time.

One Sunday morning Prince Barancovich and the Countess Doris, the two leaders in all plans for amusement, had invited Violetta to ride with them in the early morning. Count Hess was to make a fourth in the little cavalcade. The day was glorious; the general, before going to the baths, was standing with his

son on the veranda, and Violetta, in a steel-gray habit, her little black hat well over her eyes, leaned against the balustrade of the steps. The Countess had promised to call for her.

"Well, I can wait no longer," the general said at last. "I must go. What are you going to do, Magnus?"

"I am going to church, sir," his son replied, looking at his watch.

Violetta, who had hitherto been standing motionless, turned suddenly as if to ask a question, but paused at sight of Treffenbach's grave face. She blushed and looked away.

"*Au revoir, mouse,*" said her step-father. "Commend me to the Countess, and tell her to take good care of you."

With that he took his departure, and Violetta glanced shyly at the terrible young man who now approached her, but she did not run away.

"Are you going to church this minute?" she asked, timidly.

"Oh, no; it does not begin so early," he replied, having observed both her glance and her blush.

"I did not know that there was that kind of a church here," Violetta stammered. "Could I go?"

"Certainly," he replied. "If you were not going on this riding-party I would invite you to go with me."

She hesitated a moment, then said, with a sigh, "I was in one of your churches once in Berlin,—that time when—when you—you know—"

"When what? I know nothing."

His tone was stern and cold, and the effort which it cost him to talk with her aggravated this sternness. Violetta made no reply, but he was determined

not to let this opportunity slip, and he repeated his question in a gentler tone.

"When you carried me out of the church," she answered.

"Was that you?" he asked, amazed. "I had no idea of it."

"Am I so changed?"

"I do not know. I did not really see you then. I think you had on a veil."

Violetta was silent again. His thoughts wandered back to the details of that little adventure, and he gathered from them hope for the future. "Violetta," he began, after a pause, "can you not tell me why you are so afraid of me?"

She turned away; even the little ear that showed beneath her dark curls was crimson.

"Well?" he asked, gravely, but gently, as he approached her. "I mean kindly by you; far more kindly than the others who would fain ruin you with flattery."

"But you are so hard! And I cannot forget how you repulsed me two years ago. I had done you no harm."

"No harm!" he repeated, slowly. "Child, you do not know what you are saying. We had better not talk of that matter. Perhaps a time may come when you will understand. Now let us begin afresh,—shall we not? Give me your hand, Violetta; I wish to befriend you like a brother."

Timidly, and with hesitation, she placed her hand in his, but she did not look at him; her eyes sought the road beneath the trees, as if in hopes of the arrival of her friends.

"You are a spoiled child, Violetta," he said, with

some bitterness. "You stand in need of a friend to tell you the truth, to warn you, to guard you from harm; but I am almost afraid it will be labour in vain. You shrink from those who do not flatter you and say smooth things to you."

Tears rushed to her eyes, but through their veil she suddenly looked up at him and clasped her hands. "Oh, I know, I know! I am thoughtless and foolish, and there is no one to tell me when I do wrong. But indeed I will do my best, and listen to what you say, however bitter it may be. Tell me my faults, and I will be grateful to you."

"Come, that sounds well, and I am glad to hear it. Answer me one question, pray. How would you feel if all those who now flatter you were suddenly to blame you; if no one took any more notice of you; if no one petted you, or hastened to fulfil your desires?"

Her eyes opened wide. "It would be dreadful," she said. "I like to hear pleasant things, and I cannot hear enough of them. Is that wrong?"

"Yes," he said, curtly; "and it may lead to worse. Now you are but a child, Violetta, and have no aim save amusement, but in a few years, if you go on feeding this frivolous desire for admiration, you will not care how many hearts you crush beneath the chariot-wheels of your vanity."

She looked at him speechless. Suddenly the tramp of horses' feet was heard. Prince Baraneovieh, leading Violetta's saddled steed by the bridle, came first, and halted before the villa. The girl hurried down the steps, looking as if stunned by a blow, was lifted by the Prince into her saddle, and the whole cavalcade galloped off. Treffenbach stood still and listened. He heard Armin's loud, jovial tones and the pleasant

voice of the Countess Doris, but not that soft, silvery laughter. With an indescribably uncomfortable sensation he went into the house. He seemed to himself almost like a murderer. He was restless and discontented. He went to his hotel and tried to read, but could not fix his attention. He went to church, and here it wandered also.

After the service was over he again repaired to the villa to see his father, arriving just in time to witness the return of the riding-party. Violetta glided past him like a shadow. The Countess Doris called from her horse to the general through the open window, "What has your Excellency been doing with your daughter? She has looked as if she were just ready to burst into tears all through our ride."

With that they rode off. The general had not heard her words, but Magnus had, and he paced the room restlessly. At last he could endure his suspense no longer. He knocked at the door of Fräulein Emma's sitting-room, and entering, found Violetta sitting in the window-seat, still in her riding-habit. She had only taken off her hat. Her eyes showed that she had been crying, and she looked at him from beneath her dishevelled curls with positive terror,—for what was coming now?

But, to her surprise, nothing came but soothing, gentle words. He almost begged for forgiveness. He told her she must not be angry with him if he had been too harsh. He did not know her yet, that was the reason. He had not thought she would take his words so deeply to heart, and in future he would tell her of her faults in the very kindest manner.

Her face cleared up like a day in spring. This voice, this tone, were a change indeed.

At last the general opened the door. "What confidential discourse is going on here?" he cried.

"We have contracted a friendship," said Treffenbach.

"Ah!" exclaimed the general, delighted.

"And, papa, he is going to tell me all my faults."

The general burst into a fit of laughter, and looked at his son with a curious expression. "You're a good fellow, Magnus, but you're a terrible Philistine," he said in high good humour.

Treffenbach found it beneath his dignity to reply. During the remainder of the day he pondered over educational schemes that would have done honour to a Pestalozzi.

CHAPTER XVII

GAMALIEL

THE rain was pouring down in torrents. Count Hess, coming out of the door of his hotel with a gigantic umbrella, ran against another umbrella. "Oho, Treffenbach! Whither so early and in such a hurry?"

"To my father," replied this excellent son.

"How is it that in spite of this detestable weather you are so much more amiable—what shall I say?—so much more docile than usual? But I forgot. You always behave exactly as other people do not. While we commonplace souls fluttered gayly in the sunshine, you walked about like a gloomy Alva. To-day, when

everybody is crawling about in a bad temper, you are marching through the rain with elastic step and head held proudly erect. By the way, has Fräulein Violetta recovered her spirits, and what was the reason for her riding beside me yesterday like a 'rose freshly washed in a shower'?"

"Beside you?" Treffenbach inquired, sharply. "I thought that old Prince was her escort?"

"A very graphic description of a hopeful suitor. No, he devoted himself on this occasion to the Countess Doris, for *I* was there!" And the Count tapped his breast as he spoke.

A pause ensued. They walked on through the rain, which poured in streams from their umbrellas.

"Magnus," Hess began at last, "to leave jest for earnest, pray answer me one question. You were once betrothed. I hear that you are so no longer. Is this so?"

"Yes, it is so."

"And has been so for two years?"

"For two years."

"And Fräulein von Plattow is still unmarried?"

"Yes."

"Will you allow me to woo her?" Count Hess asked, looking askance at his friend, as he had done formerly when he asked the same question.

Treffenbach started. "It is not for me to allow," he replied at last. "I have no further relations with my cousin."

Count Hess bowed, as if in thanks.

"But have you any hope that she will listen to you?" Magnus asked, still more amazed.

"No. I anticipate a refusal. Nevertheless, I mean to try."

"You do not lack courage, I must say. I hear she has declined numerous proposals, and you,—you are the last man whom she would accept. Besides, they told me at Velzin that my uncle is out of health, and they are probably going to some watering-place. So you must hurry."

Count Hess said nothing. He seemed lost in thought.

"You really must make haste," Treffenbach began again. It had suddenly occurred to him that it would be an essential aid in Violetta's education to have this dangerous fellow removed. He had a way of flattering her which certainly would turn her head.

He forgot that Violetta had been surrounded by flatterers ever since she could walk and talk, and that she was too accustomed to such homage as the Count's for it to make any impression upon her.

"I think," Count Hess said, slowly, "that I shall write first, but not to-day."

Treffenbach was not greatly edified, and Hess bade him good-morning, leaving him to pursue his pedagogue train of thought. Yes, she was worldly, her mind was filled with the germs of evil, but he could not but admit that circumstances had been most to blame. She had been systematically spoiled, but her impulses were good. Fran Ehrhardt was right. Well, his patience should not fail.

Never did a shepherd climb a mountain to rescue a sheep from among thorns with more eager resolution, forgetting that the higher he climbed the deeper grew the abyss at his feet.

The general was at the baths; Fräulein Emma and Violetta were in the drawing-room, weary of the rain. The young girl looked up timidly at the visitor, and

yet in her eyes there was something of the expectation with which a child looks forward to a visit from Santa Claus,—he is terrible for naughty little ones, but he is sure to have something pretty for the good.

To-day, however, the general's return put a speedy stop to educational schemes, and again Magnus was forced to admit that his step-sister's gentle care of his father, her quiet womanly way of anticipating all his wants, were strangely inconsistent with the worldly character which he had attributed to her. The rain was forgotten. Treffenbach found the morning wonderfully short, and not until he set out again for his hotel did he notice how dark and gloomy were the skies.

The family from the villa dined daily, when not absent upon parties of pleasure, at the *table-d'hôte* of the house where Magnus, and his friend Hess with his parents, were staying; and the sight of the Count opposite him at table reealled to his mind the fact that he was now his rival; that he was about to be Marie Louise's suitor, an aspirant for that harmonious happiness which had once been the dream of his own life.

He had really forgotten all about it until now, and when he saw his friend leaning towards Violetta, and heard her gay replies to him, his only sensation was that of impatience. What was Hess waiting for? Why did he not go to Ravenhorst immediately? It would be much better for Violetta's peace of mind.

He soon discovered that he was not the only one who noticed the disturbing element. The invalid Countess Hess was watching her son narrowly. After dinner, while the general, the old Count Hess, and Colonel

Dubois were playing a game of cards, and the young people, standing in a window-recess with their backs to the rain, were chatting together, the invalid called Baron Treffenbach to her where she was seated by another window in her wheeled chair. "A charming girl, your—step-sister," she said, looking steadily at him; "really charming."

"She certainly is," he replied, coldly.

"Rather dangerous for your sex, eh? Armin raves about her. I am fully prepared to hear of his laying his freedom at her feet."

"Hardly," Magnus replied, hastily. "You forget that she was trained for the ballet."

"Oh, indeed! But she never appeared in public?"

"She did appear."

"Ah! that troubles me!"

Treffenbach said to himself, "And me too!" but he bit his lip and was silent. As the Countess perceived that she had here an ally, she went on more confidentially: "Armin is always so thoughtless. I wish he would take example by you. I greatly fear that while he is thinking only of amusing himself, that little sorceress will turn his head."

The result of this was that Treffenbach resolved to write to his uncle Plattow on the morrow and set forth the excellencies of his friend. He reflected that there was something grand and noble in this resolve. He, the rejected lover, would woo for his friend. Such conduct it would be difficult to parallel.

Instead of waiting until the morrow, that very evening he carried to his friend a carefully-written letter. The Count had a small room at the end of the corridor where his parents were lodged. This room was now filled with tobacco-smoke, and its occupant, in his

shirt-sleeves, lay stretched out on the sofa, with his feet on the small table before it.

“What are you about, Hess?” Magnus asked, with some irritation, for this picture did not exactly harmonize with the one he had just drawn of his friend in his letter to his uncle.

Hess sprang up, and blew away the smoke that he might see who was coming.

“I have been trying to smooth the way for you at Ravenhorst,” said Magnus, laying the letter on the table.

“What? Have you been writing? You are a splendid fellow!” the Count said, opening the window that the smoke might escape. “There’s a classic touch about you, Magnus. You behave like a citizen of the old Roman Republic. May I read it?”

“Of course. I will send this letter to-night, and yours can follow to-morrow.”

Hess read, and began to laugh. “Superb! old fellow. But I really cannot go on without blushing. There, take it; I will not read any more.”

“There is not an exaggerated expression in it. If it were not fundamentally true you would not be my friend.”

“Oh, I’m a splendid fellow, no doubt of that. I’m glad you’ve come to see it at last.”

The next morning, when Treffenbach went to the villa, Violetta was standing on the door-steps, looking impatiently down the road. The leaves were still dripping, for it had rained during the night, and there were still clouds here and there in the skies.

“The weather is doubtful,” she said, “and I do not know whether the Countess will come for me or not. I wish she did not mind the clouds.”

"It would be far healthier to take a pleasant walk," Treffenbach said. "And besides, Violetta, to speak frankly, these riding-parties are not to my taste. Apparently you are under the care of the Countess Doris, who I have no doubt is an excellent person, but in reality you are left entirely to the not very edifying conversation of my friend Armin."

"Is that wrong?" she asked, with an evident desire to learn, looking him full in the face.

"It is—hm!—superfluous."

"I like him so much; he is so kind and genial; always merry and always courteous."

"My child, what exaggerated expressions! Come, get your hat, and ask Fräulein Emma to go to walk with you."

"It is very damp, and I do not want to go very much."

"An excellent opportunity for self-discipline."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "Well, then, I will go. Will you come too?" she added, timidly.

"With pleasure."

She looked uncertain whether to be glad or not. He instantly observed it. "Violetta, I thought we were to be friends; and you are still afraid of me."

"No, no; I am sure you are kind. I will go and get Emma, and—we shall be at home again by the time papa comes from his bath, shall we not?"

"Assuredly."

Fräulein Emma sighed in secret, but she consented to go. Treffenbach took them a very pretty walk up the mountain-side. When a breeze stirred the branches the drops showered down upon them, and Violetta laughed. They reached a charming point of view, from which they could see far down the valley,

and here all three stood still, as silent as they had been on the way hither. At last Violetta said, half in play, half in entreaty, "And now we can go back!"

"No indeed," said Treffenbach, gravely. "You must have a fine idea of a sensible walk."

"I am a little tired; this last gay, crowded week has tired me."

"A walk is the best remedy for fatigue of that kind."

And on they went. Fräulein Emma groaned. Her loose galoshes slipped about among the damp roots of the trees that were interlaced on the pathway. Treffenbach strode on in front. Violetta was silent, and looked a little pale. As she did not say anything, he turned to her at last: "Will you go to church with me next Sunday,—to my church?"

"Oh, yes," she said quickly. "You know my father's mother was a Protestant, and ever since that time in Berlin I have wanted to go to a church like that."

"But that is not exactly my church."

"What is the difference? I am so very ignorant."

"The difference? Well, the difference cannot be explained in a few words. But I could teach you about it."

"I would much rather have you tell me the right, and what I ought to do."

"Impossible! In such matters all must reflect, study, compare, and choose for themselves."

"Ah, good heavens!" sighed the child of the Milan La Scala and of Italy's sunny skies.

Treffenbach could not help smiling. "Study would be hard for you, would it not?" he asked.

"I am afraid it would."

"Well, we will see. You may come to like it."

They paused and waited for Fräulein Emma, who came on panting. The sun had scattered the clouds for a time at least, and the valley at their feet lay glittering as if bathed in dew. Every leaf was sprinkled with jewels. Violetta gazed, lost in the beauty before her, and then looked up at her companion with a confiding smile. The distant toll of a bell broke the spell of her happy silence. "Some one is dead," she said. "Ah, how unhappy to have to die!"

Here was a fine opportunity for some edifying remarks, but none occurred to Treffenbach.

"Shall we turn back now?" Violetta asked, at last.

"No, we must reach that point up there if you mean to take what can be called a walk."

She obeyed silently, and trudged on bravely for a while; but when Magnus, arrived at the goal, looked round, he saw that Violetta instead of Emma was now the last. It vexed him. Was she still regretting the riding-party? She was obstinate, then.

"Violetta!" he called, sternly.

She looked up, trying to smile, but her face was colourless and her eyes were dull. Suddenly she clasped her arms about the slender trunk of a tree, trying to hold herself upright by it, but she slipped down, her hands lost their hold, and the next instant she was lying motionless upon the thick moss.

He was startled, and hurrying down, kneeled beside her. "What is the matter?" he asked, looking up for aid to Fräulein Emma.

"It is only my foot," Violetta murmured, bravely fighting against the fainting-fit that made the day grow dark about her. "It is of no consequence; it will soon be better."

"Poor child! Lean your head upon my shoulder; so. Wait a moment. Where is your handkerchief?" He took it and pressed it down into the wet moss, which soon drenched the delicate cambric, and he then bound it about her forehead. It was the only thing to do that he could think of, and it was effectual.

"Thanks, thanks," said Violetta. "I can see now. You are very kind."

"When I was young," Fräulein Emma remarked, with tears in her eyes, "the cousin of one of my friends dropped down dead when she was taking a walk one day."

This enlivening anecdote called forth a faint smile from Violetta, but Treffenbach shuddered. That pale little face, with half-closed eyes, suggested death and dying. "And you walked on so obediently, and never said a word about the pain."

"It came so gradually. It always comes when I have that tired feeling. It is all the fault of the gay week; it really is of no consequence. It is better already."

"But you cannot get up."

"Not yet, I am afraid."

"What is to be done? You cannot have grown much heavier in these two years, Violetta. I will carry you down the mountain."

"Oh, no, no! I am far too heavy now. Send up some men with a litter; that can easily be done."

"But the moss and the grass are dripping wet, and that cloud looks like rain."

"In Pinczow, where I was born," Fräulein Emma remarked, wiping her eyes, "a girl once died of sitting out on the wet grass."

"There, you hear," said Treffenbach; and without

more ado he lifted her in his arms and carried her down the mountain-side. But he did not propose to her to clasp her arms about his neck, and when the wind blew one of her dark curls against his cheek, his face flushed so that Violetta said, reproachfully, "You see now, I am too heavy for you."

"Nonsense!" he replied.

Thus they reached the villa, where Treffenbach received his father's reproof with exemplary meekness. In consequence of this expedition Violetta was obliged to lie on the lounge and take care of her foot for several days.

Magnus blamed himself, and accused himself of heartlessness for being so satisfied as he was with this arrangement. He now had an excellent opportunity for explaining to Violetta, as he had promised, the differences between the various Protestant doctrines. The first day, to be sure, this was impossible, for sympathizing visitors were perpetually appearing, and the Countess Doris took up her post, in true maternal fashion, by the side of the lounge, and made herself as odious, Treffenbach thought, as she was useful.

The next day, however, he seated himself, fortified with several learned-looking books, by the window, and began his lesson as the general left for the bath. When his Excellency returned he heard the murmur of a reading voice through the open window, and entering the room, he saw his son still seated at the window, his right hand slightly raised as if to give emphasis to his words, a book in his left hand and another on his knee. He was reading aloud, slowly and distinctly, while Fräulein Enna, kneeling on the floor, was gathering up the contents of her work-basket, which had upset. On the sofa lay

Violetta, her head resting on the cushion, sleeping sweetly.

His Excellency began to laugh. Magnus put down his book and looked about him with a surprised air. Violetta opened her eyes, and seemed as ashamed and terrified as a naughty child. "Oh, dear!" she murmured, glancing towards the clock. "I—I have slept an hour! Ah, don't be vexed! I had such a lovely dream about heaven and my guardian angel. Was there not something about that in the book?"

"No," said Magnus.

"Ah, don't be vexed!" she begged again.

And Magnus was not vexed. He had promised to be patient; it was thus that he excused to himself his forbearance in view of such levity. He had been reading aloud for an hour to the chairs and tables, and to—what was much the same thing—Fräulein Emma; his carefully emphasized theological definitions had been lost on the air; but how could he expect that this fluttering butterfly could be transformed in a day into a grave, thoughtful girl *à la* Marie Louise?

He should have to read to-day's discourse all over again on the morrow; but, after all, that was hardly to be regretted.

In short, he felt himself possessed of the long-suffering of a genuine pedagogue, as he followed his father to his room.

"What amusing book have you found, my dear boy, to keep Violetta so brisk and wide awake?" his Excellency asked, in high good humor,—"a ghost-story from the circulating library?"

"She herself begged me to explain to her the differences between the various Protestant sects," Treffenbach replied, gravely. "She is, as you know, a Catho-

lic, but her father's mother was a Calvinist, she tells me, which gives her an interest in Protestantism, and she asked me, since Fräulein Emma is also a Catholic, to take her on Sunday to *our* church."

"You mean the Lutheran? Will that not be rather confusing?" And the general lighted a cigar. "But do not let me interfere with your system of instruction. The kind of mathematical theology to which you are treating her can do her no harm, for she does not understand one word of it."

CHAPTER XVIII

BRIGHT SKIES IN SPITE OF CLOUDS

"COME out here, mouse; here is a surprise for you!" the general called in at the open drawing-room window.

It was a surprise indeed! There stood a dear old friend,—a lovely creature that two years previously had been fed by Violetta on sugar and bonbons, and that had in return carried her swiftly and safely on its back.

"Montrésor!" the girl exclaimed in high glee, as with a light spring from the hall steps she sat on the brown, shining back and clasped her arms about the favourite's slender neck.

Now it would have been quite reasonable for Trefenbach to be annoyed by this feat,—this reminiscence of pink gauze petticoats; but he only smiled.

"May I ride him?" Violetta asked, eagerly. "Did you send for him for that, eh?"

“He is a mare,” said the general.

“Why, then, did you give her that masculine-sounding name?”

“I did not give it to her,” Magnus replied, hastily. “But why should it sound masculine? My treasure is—well, it does not sound to me as if it meant a man.”

“Bravo!” laughed his Excellency.

From this time on all the excursions Violetta rode the brown mare, and since, as Magnus discovered, the creature had a trick of shying, he usually rode beside her. From this point of view matters wore a very different aspect from that which they had presented to him before. When those beaming looks, that gay talk, were all for him, he could not find it in his heart to remind her that it was wrong to allow her heart to cleave to the worthless gauds of this world. And what would have become of the charm of these bright mornings if he could not have heard that delicious laughter in which her whole individuality seemed to be translated into music?

The general was infinitely amused by all this, but he took good care not to make his amusement too apparent to his son. Violetta once heard him laugh aloud in his room, and she ran in to him, put her hands upon his shoulders, and said, “Are we not happy, papa?”

“I think we are, mouse.”

“We have even forgotten our cares, papa.”

“We’ll not mention those old monsters, child. All I think of now is that I have both my children with me, and that when mamma comes back our happiness promises to be perfect.”

“Oh!” cried Violetta, solemnly raising both hands. “Happiness! happiness!”

"Ah, you gypsy, what do you know about it?"

"Happiness is love!" she answered with dignity, and there was an indescribable glow upon the child-like features. "Why do you laugh, papa?"

"I should really like to know whom you love."

She confronted him with extended arms and sparkling eyes. "The whole world!"

"Aha, indeed?"

"Now you are laughing at me, papa."

"No, no. Heaven keep you just as you are! And now let us take a drive."

She ran away singing, and was just passing through the drawing-room, when she saw her young teacher seated by the window with a book in his hand. The sight of him had the effect of instantly transforming her exuberant gayety into a rather shamefaced silencee.

"Violetta!" he said, and his tone betrayed his displeasure. She had the door-handle in her grasp,—she stood still, hesitated, and sighed.

"You are angry with me. I—I have been laughing in that silly way again, and then—then—"

"Then what?" he asked, rising and approaching her. One can look into the eyes of a repentant child so much better when one stands beside her than from the other side of the room. "Then what, Violetta?"

"I am sure you heard what I said to papa when he asked me whom I loved."

There was a strange, cold look in his eyes as he rejoined, "No; but I should really like—"

"I said 'the whole world,'" she replied, dejectedly. "I felt a little sting in my heart as I said it, for I remembered how often you have told me that we ought not to love the world. I instantly begged God to for-

give me, but I am afraid it is all in vain. I shall always be thoughtless!"

The clouds on his brow vanished, and the smile that succeeded them was very becoming to his stern features. "There can be no great wrong in loving 'the whole world,' Violetta, in the sense in which you used the words, and I was not displeased with you for laughing, but because you stopped laughing as soon as you saw me. Why was it, Violetta? Am I so terrible, so disagreeable? I must go away if my presence spoils your enjoyment."

Quick as lightning she clasped her hands about his arm, as if she feared he would vanish on the instant. "No, no; you must never go away, never!"

"And why not?"

"Because it would break your father's heart."

This was not exactly what he had hoped to hear.

"Oh, he is so happy now," she went on, eagerly. "He is another man,—young and gay again. Ah, how—how he loves you! More than both of us together,—mamma and me. And he shall have you. I say it must be!"

The carriage for the drive stopped before the house, and Violetta waited for no reply. She was gone.

The general drove off with the air of a cheerful Jove, but he returned with a clouded brow. The cause of this was a letter from his lovely wife, which he had taken from the post on the way home. It was from Milan, and was as follows:

"DEAR CONSTANTIN,—I have now nibbled at every corner of Italy like a mouse at a sugar-plum. I have celebrated a hundred revivals of old associations, and refreshed as many memories, for it seems to me that

I was here in my youth a century ago, and that since then I have grown old and gray. A lifetime has rolled by to eternity in the two years during which I have had the honour and the joy of being your wife. My dearest friend, it is both an honour and a joy to me, and yet—let me frankly acknowledge—these years have been leaden-winged. Thirty such years succeeding one another would make me a thousand years old. I find here that the same time that marched so slowly and so gravely in Wilhelms-strasse can be laden with delight, gliding past on feet of quicksilver.

“What a pity it is that you are not here! The first day my arrival was made known, the people of Milan surrounded the hotel, clamouring to see me. For here, *amico mio*, it is not only from princes and citizens that we receive applause and laurels,—here an entire people claims us.

“I went out upon my balcony, and was received like a queen. Such moments always moved me deeply. I burst into tears, and looked round for some sympathetic friend upon whose breast to shed them. Ah! there was no one behind me but fat Peppino Menardi. General, you should have been there,—not behind me; no, beside me; and the people, seeing you, would have forgiven me!

“Does this sound positively crazy to you?—as if from another world? Ah, Constantin, do not forget that my world was the stage!

“But now about our daughter. You write me very gaily of the conquests that she makes; she has the world at her feet. I am sure of that. She was born under a lucky star, and attracts all hearts. But who would have thought that *your* son—that woman-hater—and *my* daughter!—I must confess that what

you say fills me with delight and exultation. When will he ask to kiss the hand of his mamma-in-law? I am not malicious, but my satisfaction is great, and I congratulate the little witch. And so, 'since then,' Count Hess and Prince Branco have retired? This does not please me. Prince Branco was in earnest, and we must not trifle away Violetta's true happiness. He is immensely wealthy, amiable, and good-natured,—a sufficient guarantee for a happy marriage. That he is old enough to be her father is of no consequence. Let Violetta marry whomsoever she will, she will love her husband, even though he be a scoundrel. She is the dearest creature in the world.

"So do your best to encourage Branco. Violetta must marry early, or what will become of her? You have refused to allow her to go upon the stage, and she has no vocation for the cloister.

"Or do you really think that your son could be so absolutely faithless to his principles? No, my friend, I cannot believe it; but I ought to have a hand in bringing matters to a climax: it is woman's work. I ought to discover whether I have any talent as a match-maker.

"We go next to Naples, whence I have received the most delightful letters. The day before yesterday I came quite unexpectedly upon Sir George O'Halloran. He has just arrived in Italy after two years in his Irish home, and seems to be mending his ways and frequenting the best society here. Of course he can always do so if he chooses, and it can never make any difference to me, who must always be proud to call him friend. The feeling that I entertain for this strange, eccentric man would seem to the world at

large quixotic. It is the love that the creature has for its creator,—the work for the master. I know he is ugly and nonsensical, but I do not care. He is sarcastic and insulting, but I forgive him. Between us there reigns that absolute frankness which often drags a friend ruthlessly over stones and thorns,—very hard to bear at the time, but beneficial in memory, like a fresh salt sea-breeze scattering unhealthy mists.

“But I will not bore you any longer with my luebrations. Please send me a few thousand *lige* to Sorrento, to the address of the Countess Sala Selvaggio. I shall be much obliged to you, for the series of entertainments given me in Venice, Florence, and Milan have fairly ruined me.

“A thousand kisses to Violetta.

“BEATRICE.”

The general paced his room to and fro with this letter in his hand, frowning gloomily. Where was it to end? She would ruin him with a smile on her lips, and what then? A few thousand *lige* were in her eyes a mere bagatelle, to be scattered from a balcony among a crowd for the sake of some dozen *vivats*. Two years ago the few thousand *lige* would have mattered nothing in view of the charming frankness of this letter; but it is not now ‘two years ago.’

On one oecasion formerly he had told her that she must set bounds to her extravagance. For the first time there was a tone of menace in his voice like the roll of distant thunder. The beautiful woman had gazed at him in dismay. She had not excused herself, she had made no lament, but the large eyes filled with tears, and seemed to say, reproachfully, ‘Are you beginning to play the domestic tyrant already?’ The

consequence was that he went out and bought her a costly trinket to obliterate the memory of the shock he had caused her. He would gladly have bought her a trinket upon every such occasion, but he could do so no longer. And the worst of it was that at the least hint from him of impending ruin she would laugh gaily, and declare, "We poor? We beggars? Do you dare to mention such a thing to Beatrice Fouquet? It is like crying over a swan that has tumbled into the water, 'Help, help, it will drown!' Let me tell you that as long as a clear note is left in my throat, the Beatrice can gain more in a single evening than she spends in a year."

And what could he do? This was her way of consoling him.

But, after all, there was no good in brooding over it. He heard Violetta singing in the next room, and laughing merrily, and he thrust his cares from him into the most hidden corner of his memory, and joined his 'two children' with a cheerful face.

He found Fräulein Emma with them, standing before the mirror, dressed in a gorgeous plum-coloured silk gown. She wore no kerchief tied about her face, and was scrutinizing her features in the glass closely, with a self-satisfied air.

"Excellency-papa," exclaimed Violetta, "we are going to the photographer's. Emma is to be photographed."

"Yes, your Excellency," said the Fräulein, blushing; "only I am almost ashamed to go through the streets without a kerchief tied around my face. I feel quite undressed."

"We'll send for a close carriage," the general said, laughing.

"Your Excellency is always making game of me."

"Not at all; on the contrary, I beg for a photograph."

This mollified the Fräulein, and Violetta called merrily, "Come, do not let us wait any longer."

"What! are you going too, mouse?"

"Indeed I must go," she declared; "the Countess Doris, and Fräulein von Andral, and a hundred others, have asked me for my picture."

Treffenbach, who had been reading by the window, now looked up. "But not in that gown?" he said, scanning Violetta gravely.

"And why not? It makes no difference."

"I think it does. Put on a white muslin, or, better still, that thing you wore the other evening at the concert. It was pale pink, with a great deal of white lace about it and pink silk rose-buds, and you had a necklace of pearls. That dress suits you better, Violetta, because—well, because it harmonizes with your figure better than that close-fitting, stiff walking-dress."

"Then I must go and change it," Violetta said, with a sigh.

"Don't forget the pearl necklace," Magnus called after her.

Scarcely was she gone when the general asked, with lifted brows, "Is this the modern method of rooting out vanity from the feminine mind, Magnus?"

His son bit his lip and coloured: "Oh, this is only a question of taste, of æsthetics."

"H'm! Nevertheless, I believe the other effect can be produced also. For if there is in Violetta's soul any trace of vanity, I am convinced that the weed is of so microscopic a kind that it must first be cultivated in order to be found and rooted out."

Soon afterward Fräulein Emma and Violetta, in long gray cloaks, passed beneath the windows outside, and looked up and nodded. Treffenbach grew restless: he could not keep his attention upon his book.

"I really had better go with them,—to see that they make a success of it."

"Oh," the general said, not without a spee of malice, "you need not be afraid; Violetta has had a deal of experience in the art of sitting for her photograph."

"Yes, but Fräulein Emma? It will be frightful, if some one does not prevent her from holding a basket of flowers or something of the kind in her hand."

"You are right. Go, then, and take care of poor Emma."

Magnus took his hat and hurried out. Heavens, how they must have walked! There was nothing to be seen of them, and the noonday sun was scorching. In his haste he almost ran against several people sauntering slowly along. At last some one came hurrying after him. "Treffenbach! halloo, Treffenbach!"

"Good-morning, Armin. Excuse me, I am in a hurry."

"But stop, stop! I am out of breath, and I must speak with you!"

"What is the matter?"

Count Hess stood breathless beside him, holding him tight by the sleeve that he might not escape him. "Listen, Magnus. I am betrothed!"

"To whom?"

"You know."

"I congratulate you with all my heart," said Treffenbach, peering into the distance; "but will you please excuse me for a moment? I am in a great

hurry ; the ladies are waiting. I will come to you to-day after dinner." And he broke away and hurried on.

"The deuce!" said Hess ; and he walked away, laughing, and whistling a waltz.

Meanwhile, Treffenbach had reached the photographer's atelier, just at the moment when the prepared plate was being adjusted.

Fräulein Emma was trying all kinds of graceful attitudes at the end of the room, while Violetta's light figure stood out against the gray background of the screen. Treffenbach advanced hastily. "Why have you made your hair so smooth, Violetta?" he asked ; "and I do not like that position. There, that's better ; and let your hair curl upon your forehead, so ; that is more natural."

"Will the lady kindly look upwards?" said the photographer.

"Nonsense!" Magnus exclaimed, eagerly ; "not such a heaven-appealing glance as that. Now clasp your hands, naturally, as you are apt to stand. That is just right."

"And where shall I look?" she asked.

"Look at me. That is quite natural." And he stood beside the photographer. Violetta obeyed, but she began to smile.

"Now, if you please!" said the man, taking off the cover. "One, two, three."

Treffenbach had made himself the target of a look which he found it hard to meet calmly. It rested upon him full and warm as the sunshine, steadfast, without a quiver. A delicate flush rose to Violetta's cheek ; a sweet, arch smile hovered upon her lips. Magnus felt his heart suddenly begin to beat wildly, and yet it was as if the sunshine of that glance aroused that

heart from its wintry sleep, flung wide locked doors, and let in the fresh breath of spring, to wake to life what had hitherto been cold and dead.

"Thanks!" said the impassible photographer, putting on the cover again. "This picture ought to be perfect."

"Now for the other lady!" said Violetta; "her picture is by far the more important."

Fräulein Emma's sitting was an affair of time; she could not soon decide upon a position, but Treffenbach's patience was inexhaustible. Meanwhile, he stood beside Violetta, watching her fasten the long row of buttons on her gloves.

"Why did you make so strange a face when I looked at you, Baron Treffenbach?" his pupil asked him, curiously.

"What kind of a face?"

"Oh, an entirely indescribable face."

"Indeed! But why do you call me Baron Treffenbach? Why not say Magnus?"

"I will. Magnus, did you ever button a lady's gloves?" she asked. "Little Lieutenant Cserny does it so beautifully; buttons one button, and then looks up so sweetly and asks, 'Is that right?' and then another——"

He turned away, and the stern expression came into his eyes again.

"One, two, three," the patient photographer counted, and Fräulein Emma sat bolt upright with immense solemnity in a richly-carved arm-chair.

"Dear Magnus," Violetta whispered at last, half timidly, half smiling, "if I do wrong it is your duty to tell me so, but not to be silent." And her sweet face, framed in soft curls, looked entreatingly at him from beneath her white hat.

“You are right; but I always forget with whom I have to deal. It is not the thing, Violetta, to allow every silly lieutenant who comes along to button your gloves for you. There is no harm in the act in itself, but it shows such a desire for admiration, so frivolous a——”

“But I never told you that he buttoned *my* gloves. It was Aimée Dubois. I only looked on.”

Treffenbach said nothing, but he began to smile.

“You are very strict,” sighed Violetta.

“I am afraid, my poor child, that I am too harsh with you. Forgive me, Violetta.”

“All through!” the photographer called out.

CHAPTER XIX

A BETROTHAL

AN accidental glimpse of the Countess Hess's wheeled chair reminded Magnus of his promise to go to his friend after dinner. He found him in his room writing.

“Ah, here you are, Magnus! Well, you find me writing my first letter to my betrothed. My betrothed! My brain reels at the thought. Can you understand it? One thing is clear, and very delightful,—nothing can disturb our friendship, old fellow. Give me your hand. Even this affair changes nothing between us.”

“Certainly not,” Treffenbach said, sincerely. “And let me tell you frankly, Marie Louise is just the wife whom you need.”

“Not a doubt of it; but it seems incredible to me that I should be the husband whom she needs. That I never ventured to hope. Now I wish I had read your letter!”

Treffenbach hardly relished this allusion to his influential epistle. “You can read it at Ravenhorst, Armin, and then tell me if I said one word too much. Now tell me all your plans.”

“They are precisely what yours would have been if——” And Count Hess could not refrain from laughing.

“You intend, then,” Treffenbach said, taking no notice of his friend’s merriment, “to give up your position in Brussels and live at Ravenhorst.”

“Of course. Marie Louise will not leave her old grandparents alone there, and the estate needs attention, etc. I have written to her that the lot of the country aristocracy has always seemed to me very enviable, particularly in the summer. Immense agricultural activity, combined with immense loitering. We may indulge in the pleasure of having our hands kissed by the sun.” And he laid his snow-white hand upon the table. Only one costly seal ring adorned this hand, the beauty of which was well known in many a drawing-room, and the possession of which was coveted by many a fair dame. “Yes, look, Treffenbach; see what the toilette of this spoiled creature costs me in time, soap, perfume, and gloves! What a whimsical, capricious carpet-knight it is! What a positive cult it requires! I take malicious delight in the thought that its tyranny is wellnigh ended, that I shall bring it home in the evenings scratched, brown, scarred, and can say to it, Ha, lazybones, are you learning to work at last?”

"Admirable! With such ideas, Armin, you will be thoroughly contented at Ravenhorst."

"Contented? Well, we shall see! But I tell you, my dear Magnus, you know nothing about it. I tell you, Daniel in the den of lions needed less courage than I! And when I say this, understand that I make no allusion to your two amiable old relatives. Would you like to read your aunt Plattow's letter? I must say it delighted me."

From the letter Treffenbach learned all the changes that had taken place in the last two years in the monotonous life at Ravenhorst. They were not many. Instead of recovering his eyesight, the old Herr had lost it almost entirely. He could still go about the house and garden, where every step was familiar to him, but his life was darkened and saddened. His wife devoted herself entirely to tending and entertaining him, while Marie Louise conducted the affairs of the household and of the estate in a masterly manner, overseeing the schools and providing for the comfort and good of all. The letter did not say, but nevertheless one gathered from it, that she was not perfectly content, perfectly happy,—that she had expected more of life. But what? Marriage? She had had opportunities enough to marry in these two years, but she had rejected all proposals.

"What is it, then?" Count Hess asked, dubiously. "She will not repent this step? No; if that were possible she would not have accepted me."

"Marie Louise always acts so prudently," Treffenbach rejoined, warmly defending his cousin, "that there is no need for repentance. She may regret, but she never reproaches herself. Rest assured that what has perhaps irritated her is the desire for a wider field of

action. Hers is an extraordinary character, Armin, perspicuous, clear, strong. She strives to attain the highest aims of universal philanthropy. And even if a larger field of action were to open before her, she never would neglect minor duties, for she is conscientious in small matters as well as in great. Ravenhorst, which it was once her dream to make a model estate, has become too narrow for her; her capacity has grown with exercise. She could do more now, and she feels it. Still, she is bound to Ravenhorst, because she is indispensable to her grandparents. And she suffers mentally, thirsting for action as she does. I have not seen her since we parted, but I know all this, for I know her as I know myself."

Whilst his friend was speaking, Count Hess had suppressed several yawns. He now looked at him and smiled: "And I tell you, my dear Magnus, that she is far more extraordinary than you suspect. You think you know her. You know nothing of her. You never had any curiosity to find out whether this beautiful marble statue has a heart or not. I am going to study her, and if I find her capable of human emotion I will forgive her for her superhuman excellence."

"That is a rather surprising conclusion," said Trefenbach, smiling.

"You and Fräulein von Plattow are spiritual twins," Hess concluded, as he folded up the letter. "And this explains the possibility of the calm continuance of our friendship under these peculiar circumstances. There! And now let us go and make my mother happy. Quick, quick, instruct me somewhat as to the worldly circumstances of my future wife, that I may not absolutely fail in the examination I am about

to undergo. Is she poor? Is she rich? Is she independent? Has she any brothers or sisters of whom there is no intimation in the depths of my consciousness? It occurs to me that Frau von Bellwitz once exclaimed, with clasped hands, in my presence, 'How absurd for Magnus Treffenbach, with all his money, to marry a wealthy girl like Marie Louise! Why couldn't he make some poor girl happy?' This is well. My mother will be *very* glad, for she is as practical in her views as Frau Bellwitz."

Hess was not disappointed. His mother was delighted. She declared that such joy would certainly restore her to health. In the evening they supped with the Treffenbachs, and toasted the newly-betrothed couple. Magnus was heroically cheerful. One could not but admire him, his wicked father whispered to the old Countess. He was immensely supported in his unselfish cheerfulness by seeing how gaily Violetta received the news that this delightful Count Armin was betrothed. She took great delight in it. She asked many questions, and drank his special health, declaring that she had suspected something of the kind all along,—he had seemed so happy and so attentive to every one. And then she had a little dispute with old Count Hess, who contended that love makes people absent-minded and unamiable.

On this evening, however, Armin received a letter that necessitated his immediate return to Brussels. He had to depart the next day, instead of going to Ravenhorst, as he had hoped, and it was very doubtful when he should be able to go thither. Violetta had no cause to compliment him again upon his amiability before he left.

The ensuing days brought a renewal of gayeties, although the circle of acquaintance was not precisely the same. The Countess Doris had left, as had also the French colonel with his daughters. Prince Barancovich, with his four-in-hand and his huge dogs, was still constant to his post, playing piquet with the general, and upon every conceivable and inconceivable occasion sending a bouquet of roses to Violetta, who always received them with the same happy laugh.

"Mouse," her stepfather said, warningly, "if you are not careful the Croat will swing you up on the saddle before him some fine day and bear you off to his castle at Agram, and papa and mamma will be left in the lurch."

"Oh, no! oh, no!" said Violetta, shaking her head and smiling.

"Then do not seem so frankly delighted with his flowers. Tell him their fragrance gives you the headache."

"Oh, no! oh, no! I cannot lie!" the girl sang, carelessly.

"Indeed? You like him, then?"

"Oh, yes! oh, yes!"

"Very well. Madame the Princess Barancovich, come here and receive my paternal blessing."

"Oh, no! oh, no!"

"She's a terrible child, eh, Magnus?" the general said, in mock despair.

"I like the old Prince very much," Violetta declared, with dignity. "But liking very much and marrying are two very different affairs."

"Magnus, what shall we do with her?"

His son looked up from his book. Violetta closed

her eyes and murmured, "Now for my death-warrant."

"How old are you?" Magnus asked, vainly endeavouring to make his voice sound stern.

"I am seventeen."

"Then you really ought to be more sensible." And he became apparently absorbed in his book again, but only apparently.

This morning the photographs came home. While Fräulein Emma retired blushing to her room with her packet, Magnus arranged the twelve cabinet pictures of his pupil, like a game of patience, on the table before him, and then sat gazing at them, his head propped on both hands, like a—an art-connoisseur.

"Heyday, mouse!" said the general, approaching the table, "of whom were you thinking while these were taking?"

It was, in fact, a bewitching picture that lay in twelve-fold reduplication on the table, bewitching because of the entire lack of self-consciousness in the expression. Smile and glance did not belong to the occupation of the moment.

Treffenbach sat as if spell-bound. She gazed at him from the picture just as she had done in reality. Colour alone was wanting. Again his heart beat fast, and he felt a little dizzy. Suddenly, as if awaking from a dream, he gathered up all the pictures, put them in the envelope, and left the room, taking them with him. Violetta did not observe this, for Fräulein Emma had returned, extremely discontented with her counterfeit presentment. It was 'a horrid picture,' she never had 'such a long nose as that,' nor did she ever 'sit up so stiff and straight.' Violetta tried to soothe the poor Fräulein's disappointment by all kinds

of consoling suggestions, and only remembered an hour afterward, at dinner, to ask Magnus where her pictures were.

“Where they belong.”

“That must be a terrible place,” the girl whispered, shyly, “for I believe you disapprove of having photographs taken of one’s self.”

“Take a few more strawberries, Violetta,” was his reply.

“No, thank you. And you are quite right, Magnus. It is a very foolish thing to do, and costs so much money;” she sighed. She had ‘cares’ too.

“Are your finances so low?” Treffenbach asked, gaily. “Well, then, I have been to the photographer’s, and have paid both for your and poor Emma’s pictures.”

“Oh, how delightful! I will take a few more strawberries.”

“Violetta,” one of the Vienna Countesses called out, “I am to have one of your photographs, am I not?”

“And I?” Prince Barancovich begged.

Violetta, besieged by petitioners, began to reckon on her fingers, and in five minutes the whole dozen were given away.

As they were going home, the general met an old friend, with whom he walked on before, while Magnus and Violetta loitered a little behind. She looked up at him with her sunny, unconscious smile, and said, “My pictures, Magnus!”

“They all belong to me. I paid for them.”

“Papa will give you the money again. Don’t be so stingy, my dear Magnus. Where have you put them? You heard them all given away.”

"Yes, you can go to the photographer's and sit for some more."

"Oh, but that is absurd!" exclaimed Violetta. "Why must not these pictures be given away?"

"Because they belong to me alone; or should you be willing to look at Prince Barancovich as you looked at me?"

"I do not understand you. I am so sorry about those pictures! Have you torn them all up?" she added, dejectedly. "Was there something wrong in them, Magnus?"

She asked this in a low voice, and looked up at him with tears in her eyes.

"No," he replied in a tone as low, and there was the unmistakable ring of passion in his voice, "nothing wrong, Violetta. And where have I put them? I am wearing them next my heart."

She looked up at him surprised. She had often during her young life had such things said to her. When she was ten years old, she had with lavish generosity cut off curls for those who petted and spoiled her, and had frequently been assured that souvenirs so precious should be worn 'next the heart.' Only a day or two before, Prince Branco had picked up a rose-bud that had fallen from her hair, and had begged her leave to wear it next his heart. All this did not surprise her. It was jest and courtesy, in return for which one laughs and forgets. But such words from the lips of her grave instructor,—a man who read aloud to her every morning such serious, dry, incomprehensible things, in order to 'form her mind'! She was mute with astonishment for a moment. Then she began to laugh roguishly. "Twelve cabinet photographs next your heart? They must make you rather warm."

“Yes; they burn.”

The girl at once became thoughtful, and there were traces of disappointment and uneasiness on her lovely face. Treffenbach instantly perceived this, but he waited to hear what she would say. As she did not speak, he asked, “What is the matter? Are you displeased, Violetta?”

“I do not know,” she said, with a sigh. “I am astonished. I do not like to hear you talk like—all the rest! It is not like yourself.”

“Well, Violetta, you shall not have cause to complain of me again. I—I hardly know what I said.”

They walked on in silence. The day was rarely lovely, even for fine summer weather. At least so Magnus thought. The air was clear and full of sunshine, with a rustle and whisper among all the leaves. Music and glad voices resounded far and near. On such a day we feel that the world lives and moves and breathes, and its breath comes life-giving and fragrant, wafted across the meadows where the hay lies drying.

In the afternoon Treffenbach had letters to write, and did not go to the villa until tea-time. He found Fräulein Emma sitting at the little tea-table on the veranda. His Excellency and Violetta, she said, were in the drawing-room. Prince Barancovich had been there to get his picture, and it had not been given him, and this had been the occasion for a declaration. “A declaration,” Fräulein Emma concluded, wiping her eyes, “which every one has foreseen except Violetta, who is bathed in tears. Poor child!”

Treffenbach walked to and fro in great agitation. His father appeared soon, rubbing his hands, and seeming not at all as if there had been any unpleasant

scene. "Emma has told you, I suppose, Barancovich came, and there was a positive explosion. I've made it rather hot for the little one. A splendid fellow! She must not reject him. To-morrow evening he is coming for her consent. It will be a fine surprise for her mother!" And his Excellency looked keenly into his son's face. Treffenbach was ashy pale, and did not say one word. Nor did he see how his father rubbed his hands beneath the table. At last Violetta appeared, looking rather frightened, and it was easy to see that she had been crying. Tea was drunk in silence. After it was over, the general complained that the air was cool, and went within-doors. Fräulein Emma followed the servant with the tea-equipage. Treffenbach started up, and went to the vine-wreathed balustrade to scan the evening sky.

"It will certainly storm to-morrow," he said at last, merely for the sake of saying something.

"Ah, I should be so glad! There would then be an end of the enormous picnic that they have all been talking about for two weeks," Violetta murmured, dejectedly, from where she was sitting.

"Pray come here, Violetta. You must tell me what is the matter with you."

She obeyed, but with a downcast air, and stood beside him at the balustrade, looking up at him as if for aid. "Oh, I am so wicked, Magnus! so wicked! You both warned me, but I did not believe you. I never knew how unhappy we could make people through our wrong-doing. Oh, Magnus, help me; try to make me better!"

"Do not cry so, Violetta. Poor child! how you tremble! Do not take it so to heart. Prince Barancovich will go away. You must forget him."

"Papa says I am a naughty child, and that I must marry him."

He put his arm around her waist, and gently and caressingly stroked back her curls. There was unutterable tenderness in his voice as he said, "Be comforted, darling; I will not allow it."

And then he saw those large eyes beam again, saw the happy smile return to her lips, and he stood there like one who does not know whether he is awake or is dreaming a fairy-tale. His gaze wandered away to the rustling tree-tops, down to the sparkling fountain, and then back again to those unfathomable violet eyes that were looking into his own shyly, archly, and—"Thanks, oh, thanks!" the girl suddenly whispered, and, with a smile, she was gone,—vanished, like an unsubstantial vision, a wreath of mist.

He roused himself, passed his hand across his brow, and began slowly to descend the steps.

"Halloo, old fellow!" his father's voice called to him. His Excellency was smoking his evening cigar at the drawing-room window. "Are you going already?"

"Yes; good-night," his son replied, without looking up. The general, however, had a fancy to see his face. It occurred to him that he had that day received a letter which he wished to show to his son. He felt in his pockets. "Wait, Magnus, wait; I have here a—Where did I put it? Ah, here it is. Read that, and tell me to-morrow what you think of it."

He handed him the letter, but he was foiled in his purpose. His son contrived to take it without looking up. The general turned from the window with a laugh, while Magnus went his way. What were his thoughts? Unfortunately, it must be confessed that to-night, profound thinker though he was, he had none worthy the

name. He wandered through the summer evening possessed by delicious, dreamy sensations. He might have been the son of a caliph; were these vine-wreathed balconies and balustrades the minarets of Bagdad? these dark roses the pomegranates of the East? Who could tell?

At times he paused and looked up, following the lines and angles of the roof of a house, as if he had nothing in the world to do save to study the laws of geometry.

When at last he reached his room, and the servant brought the light, he found on his table several letters, which he opened and read mechanically. One was a letter from the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. He read the names Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, and he smiled. All that was now a secondary consideration. The matter of chief importance was whether the twelve photographs were still in his breast-pocket. Good heavens! what if the packet had been stolen from him? Or his pocket might have been torn and the pictures now be lying in the dust of the highway, to be trampled by the feet of men and horses! He hastily felt for them; ah! there they were all safe. He took them out and drew forth one from the envelope, looked at it a little while, and then bent down and kissed it:

CHAPTER XX

AWAKENING

THE day of the 'enormous picnic' dawned festally. It was clear that something grand and beautiful was to take place. The sun rose in cloudless skies, and, as if at a given signal, a chorus from hundreds of birds rang out clear and full, while invisible hands decked meadow, hill, and glen with millions of diamond dew-drops.

Treffenbach, in the hotel garden, was, with the gardener's permission, cutting a bouquet of magnificent roses. The man asked whether they were not for the lovely daughter of the Prussian Excellency, and upon Magnus's nod of assent, refused to accept payment for them; the Fräulein was an angel,—an assertion which the young man did not gainsay.

Those engaged for the picnic were already astir. There rolled the four-in-hand of the Croatian magnate, driven by himself, and here were two merry officers in blue uniform coming down the steps with rattling sabres.

A groom led up the brown mare. There was a lady's saddle upon Montrésor's back, which, with bit and bridle, had been carefully selected by Baron Treffenbach himself. He now tested the girths, saw that everything was in order, had the horse which he rode himself brought out, and bidding the groom follow him with both steeds, set out for the villa, walking quickly, impatiently.

When he reached it, he saw Violetta's head at the window where on the previous evening the general had been smoking his cigar. She pushed up the veil of her black riding-hat and tossed a flower down to him.

"How late you are, loiterer! It is half a minute past the time, and in that half-minute we have had a great, a very great surprise. Do you hear nothing?"

"I certainly do hear something inexplicable. I hear your voice here and in the drawing-room too!"

"Come in!" the girl cried, merrily.

A sudden anxiety oppressed him. He was filled with a vague foreboding, but before he could analyze its cause he stood on the threshold of the little drawing-room, and he seemed to be rehearsing a scene that he had gone through before. The room was not light, the sun shone into it through half-closed blinds, and it was filled with the fragrance of flowers. Again he saw beside him his father's tall, military figure, and from the lounge arose a form of wondrous grace and dignity, gorgeously attired, with golden chains about her neck and wrists, from which last tinkled a profusion of little sparkling golden crescents. Her black curling hair was dressed low upon her forehead, her large, liquid eyes drew his own shrinking glance to meet them, and held it fast, forcing him to stand firm.

"Magnus," his father said, gravely, "you know who this is,—Violetta's mother."

There was a ringing and humming in his ears, and then suddenly he felt quite calm, possessed by a bitter, hopeless melancholy. He seemed to have forced his way slowly, step by step, into an enchanted garden, and all at once the gates were closed behind him,—he was a prisoner!

Violetta's mother! Oh, yes; no need to tell him that. They both stood before him, the full-blown rose and the opening bud which a day of sunshine might unfold to a like splendour. The voice, whose tone thrilled his every nerve; the smile, the captivating charm of which had infatuated him; the eyes, which in their blue, fathomless depths beneath the long dark lashes revealed the Irish descent,—all, all the same. Oh that he could escape, as on that other day! but he cannot. Oh that he could repulse, as on that other day, the fair hand extended in welcome! but he cannot. Oh, that he could hate this woman, as on that other day! but he cannot. He loves her every charm in her daughter! He feels that he is lost without hope of rescue, entangled and held in slavery, and he is a prey to wild despair. He is conscious that he is holding Beatrice's small, warm hand in his own and covering it with kisses, for that little hand is stronger than his scorn and his indignation.

And then he sees his father pacing the room excitedly, and hears him say, "Ah, mouse, to-day is the happiest of my life! She is here, and I have both my children besides! No more separations as long as we live, eh?"

But—

Stay! many will exclaim here. What does that 'but' mean? Where is the use of it? The story is really ended. What more can there possibly be to say except, 'And they lived happy as birds ever after, and if they are not dead are living so still. *Basta!*'

Yes, it would be charming if it could all turn out as it does for good children in the story-books,—delightful if at such moments we could cry stay, close our eyes, and leave the future to the imagination.

But life strides onward; the 'impracticable hours' pass unceasingly, inexorably. There are no pauses; least of all can we close the book of events when it pleases us, and say, Henceforward there shall be nothing but sunshine and joy.

Magnus Treffenbach was not the man to yield without a struggle to a temptation for which he had suddenly found the name. Was anything changed since that day when he had first met Beatrice Fouquet? Nothing at all. She was the same person, only since then she had usurped his mother's title, honours, and position. And Violetta was her daughter.

Had he not known all this before? Had he not said it to himself? Oh, yes, a hundred times. What he had never yet said frankly to himself was, that he loved this daughter.

Oh, this was a strange day! He could not escape; he was bound magnetically by double chains. His heart was sore with the vain struggle to throw off these fetters, and meanwhile he played his part, talked, made answer, and was, as her beautiful Excellency expressed it, 'extremely sympathetic.'

First two high hunting-wagons full of chatting, laughing, beckoning dames and cavaliers drew up before the villa.

They went out. Her Excellency Beatrice was greeted with enthusiasm. They begged her to join the party, and she was ready. The general lifted her into the first vehicle, and sprang up beside her. Then Prince Branco's four-in-hand came rushing up, and a whole cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen. Treffenbach knew that he with his *protégée* was to join this. Montrésor was led up. Magnus himself lifted Violetta into the saddle, and advised her to ride on the

left side of the road, on account of the dust. Whither they were to ride he had forgotten, nor did he care. Violetta was very gay and joyous, but her jests and laughter pained him. They reminded him of her mother. Her sprightly nonsense filled him with horror to-day.

The entire party assembled upon a wooded height. Carriages and horses remained below. The servants carried up in hampers all that was requisite for a correct *déjeuner à la fourchette*. They sat beneath the trees. Some admired the view; others insisted that there was a ruin in the neighborhood, and that it was a duty to explore it. Of course her Excellency von Treffenbach was soon the ruling spirit of the assembly. Prince Branco built her a kind of throne of cushions and rugs, whereon she sat in state, a glass of champagne in one hand, a biscuit in the other. Her attention was given chiefly to the Prince, who was positively revivified, and took fresh courage.

There was no end to the talk, song, and laughter. Music added its strains, and a band of gypsies appeared, and sent their ambassador to ask whether they should not tell the fortunes of the lords and ladies. Amid shouts of laughter it was discovered that these gypsies were a part of the company disguised. The youngest lieutenant made a charming gypsy queen in a red petticoat and a large turban. The mirth and jollity reached their height when, with his eyes bound, he was compelled to unveil the future for each of the party. Wonderful things were foretold, and at every fresh revelation the laughter increased. At last Violetta could laugh no longer; she was tired out with gayety. She came and sat

down beside Treffenbach upon a felled tree. It was a refreshment to look at his grave face, and she whispered to him, "Ah, my dear Magnus, this has been too gay and merry; I do not know where I shall find the strength to ride home."

"Then drive home."

"Oh, no," she whispered, with a startled look; "there is no room except in the Prince's carriage."

The heat of the day had subsided when all made ready for the homeward way. The day had been a vari-coloured chaos for Magnus; and this homeward ride was spectral, unreal. Violetta could not ride very quickly, and every one seemed to think it quite natural that Baron Treffenbach should stay beside her. Twilight was approaching, and all the voices, the rumble of carriage-wheels, the whinnying of horses, passed them by and died away in the distance, and the evening light brooded calm and tinged with gold over the meadows. The larks that had trilled high overhead in the morning were mute; a thrush piped softly in the bushes by the wayside, and in the distance a nightingale was beginning to sing. Violetta sat quiet, as if lost in dreams; she was not troubled by the persistent silence of her companion. Like herself, he doubtless sought repose after the bustle of the day. She did not surmise the unrest of his soul,—how his head ached and throbbed, and his thoughts pursued the same unvarying round.

When she turned her clear glance towards him, he felt the force of the sweet, subtle charm assert itself irresistibly,—his heart pleaded wildly for its rights: 'Resign yourself utterly. Forget all other considerations. It is too late for any such!' But he turned deaf ears to this voice as to a beguiling temptation,

and called to his aid the memory of a dim, quiet room, and of another voice that had once told him the story of the captive king beneath the waters of the lake, and that had whispered with its last failing strength, 'Always be what you are now. Never be afraid to flee from temptation. You will test the glittering gold and be sure that it is pure refined metal; that she is good and true, and worthy to be the mistress of Velzin.'

Ever more and more distinctly these words, at first faint and shadowy, rang in his ears. His mother's image arose before his mental vision. He shuddered, and as he looked abroad over field and fell, all nature seemed to take on a gray ghostly hue.

Magnus Treffenbach could never carry home a Violetta Fouquet to the old house where his mother had lived. Impossible!

This thought had been so foreign to his mind that it had not occurred to him before. He loved her—ah, now first he knew how truly, how passionately, with what delicious pain! But there was that within him that was stronger than this flame: his pride, his egotism. These were not the names he gave it. Even supposing that he could be insane enough to offer her his name, what place was there for her in his home? She was not made for an idyl upon the shore of that calm, flower-strewn lake. She would perish in that solitude like a rose in the desert.

Thus pride excused its cruelty. And still the tortured heart pleaded, 'Oh, grant me my rights! She is so young, so gentle; she will adapt herself to everything!'

She? Never! True, she is still young and gentle, but what will she be in the future? She has her mother's

voice, her eyes, her nature; fancy presenting yourself beside that calm death-bed with Violetta Fouquet, the trained ballet-girl, the daughter of an actress, and saying to your mother, 'Here is the future mistress of Velzin, my wife.'

The struggle ended. Treffenbach passed his hand across his brow and turned to his companion. As their eyes met, something that had lived and shone in his seemed extinguished.

"How silent you are!" Violetta said, smiling, touching her horse with her whip, so that it paced close beside her companion's. "Are you thinking of this lovely, peaceful summer evening?"

"No," he replied, with an effort. "I was thinking of the future."

"Ah? What are you going to do in the future?" she asked, curiously.

Every word that he now uttered cost him a struggle, and yet it must be said. It would be like signing and sealing a document. "I have received a notice to report myself as Secretary of Legation in Rio de Janeiro,—that is what I must do."

At first she looked puzzled, then she asked, in dismay, "Go to America?"

"Yes."

"Oh, that is nonsense! You are only jesting," she said, confidently.

"Most certainly not. Before I came to Teplitz I had determined to go."

"That is not true! That is not true!"

"It is true!"

She looked at him, and her eyes filled with tears. "You will not so grieve your father; oh, no, you cannot?" she pleaded, in a trembling voice.

“I am afraid I must. Violetta, we must not yield to such considerations when real interests are at stake. My father knows this. The six weeks that we have passed together have been—very pleasant, but they were holidays. The declaration, ‘no more separations as long as we live,’ cannot really be fulfilled. Oh, my child, do not cry so!” he interrupted himself, passionately; “do not use this means to—turn me from my duty. I must go back to my work, and you—when I see you again you will be married, and my father—believe me—he does not need us both!”

He forced his horse up close beside her so that he could take from her eyes the hand that covered them and search their depths to see whether those hot tears were shed for him. Had they been so shed, perhaps his resolution would have yielded, and the bulwark of his arrogance and Pharisaic pride would have crumbled beneath the omnipotence of love; but no! These were the tears of a child, and her grief was that of an unselfish child, as she sobbed forth reproachfully, “Oh, it is wrong, very, very wrong! It will break his heart. Oh, what shall I do? I dread the future!”

“And so do I, Violetta. A desolate future lies before me, but I must be strong to go forth to meet it,—to labour and to struggle, resisting the allurements and temptations of the world.”

She dried her tears, still murmuring, “Your poor father; it is not right, Magnus, it is not right.”

He talked seriously and conclusively to her, speaking like a man instructing a child. He talked of duty, of labour, of what life requires of us. She listened in silence. From time to time a sob shook her delicate frame, and once she dropped the bridle and clasped

her arms about the horse's neck, murmuring, "Oh, I am afraid! I am afraid!"

Of what? She did not herself know. It seemed to her that if he went away a heavy burden must fall upon her,—a burden not too heavy for his strong shoulders, but beneath which she should be crushed. And this burden was life.

Thus they rode through the darkening shadows, and to both the lovely landscape around them looked changed, grimly distorted.

When they reached the villa, they heard from within the laughing voices of those who had arrived before them. Treffenbach dismounted in silence to lift his companion from her horse. "Good-night, Violetta," he said, in a low tone.

She was standing on the veranda steps. For a moment she hesitated, and then she threw her arms about him as once before, and whispered, with a world of caressing entreaty in her voice, "Oh, stay, stay, stay! Do not leave us! I beg, I implore you as my brother!"

He did not now thrust her from him. Trembling with agitation, he gently loosened her clasping arms and put them from him; his voice was not harsh, but full of pain, as he said, almost inaudibly, "Violetta, Violetta! do not tempt me beyond my strength. You beg me to stay, but it is from *you, you* that I must flee,—you who make my father's home mine no more forever. Can you understand this, child? No, no, you cannot!"

With a profound sigh, he turned, took both horses by their bridles, and slowly walked away.

At some distance from the villa he looked back, and through the darkness could still perceive a dark figure leaning against the balustrade of the veranda. Yes,

he even fancied that he could see the pale, reproachful little face, which he felt must haunt his memory all through his future life.

CHAPTER XXI

RAVENHORST'S 'YOUNG MASTER'

"Oh, yes, it was to be. I always said my Fräulein would be sure to marry a Count and be a Countess like her blessed mother. I am sure every one could see it just to look at her."

Thus spoke Doris, the old housekeeper at Ravenhorst, as she was walking through the suite of rooms in the second story of the old mansion, feather-duster in hand, making sure that everything was in readiness for the young couple to be installed here. The windows were wide open everywhere, and a soft, delicious air was wafted through the rooms, whence there was a charming view, over and beyond the trees on the terrace, of a wide stretch of country. This story had been occupied by Marie Louise's parents during their brief married life, and everything had remained in its old order,—the pictures on the walls, the furniture, the bric-à-brac on tables and shelves, which Frau Doris had dusted so carefully,—nothing had been changed. The housekeeper passed into the next room, the one devoted specially to the 'young master.' Here the fine collection of weapons, the stuffed eagle over the book-case, the turning-lathe, and a cabinet of minerals, all bore witness to the tastes of its former owner,

the young Herr von Plattow. In the adjoining study and smoking-room the walls were lined with books. An oaken writing-table, a reeling-chair covered with a panther-skin, a large fireplace, and a pipe-rack, about which Frau Doris's feather-brush fluttered persistently, made this room look very comfortable. Here the future master might smoke his dozen Havanas daily without fearing to spoil the curtains, for the hangings had been chosen by Grandmamma Plattow with magnanimous consideration, and were covered with a tracery of brown that looked like wreaths of smoke.

Frau Doris wiped away a tear as she gazed around her. Twenty-five years ago she had aired these rooms, when everything was fresh and new, and when she was expecting a young couple for whom she prayed for health, happiness, and a long life.

The old woman became aware that she was no longer alone. Frau von Plattow had come up, and was standing in the door-way, lost in memories of her son so early lost, and of her lovely daughter-in-law.

“Everything looks as it should, Doris. Marie Louise will be glad to find nothing changed. Her mother's papers and books are still on the writing-table just as she left them. I have been thinking whether we might not put some flowers in the rooms. You know, Doris, my daughter-in-law, the dear child, always had her drawing-room filled with flowers, and every morning she put one in my son's buttonhole.”

“Yes; and the young master wore it all day long, and thought it a great grief to lose it.”

“They were so young and happy.” And the old lady sighed.

“Madame will allow me to say that I like the young Count, too, very much. He has such a kindly look in

his eyes. Now, Baron Magnus has known me since he was a boy, and he was always very polite to me, but very formal. But the Herr Count took my hand in both his, and called me 'my dear Doris.' Oh, he is a pleasant gentleman! And our Fräulein,—she suits him. Yes, yes! But flowers? No, I would not put them in her room. She is not used to them. She isn't like other girls, who think of nothing but their birds and rose-bushes. Our Fräulein has better things to think of, and we must remember it. It is not given to every one to remain a child while life lasts, like our blessed young mistress now above."

Doris was privileged, and always had a word to say in defense of her young mistress when her grandmother looked so anxious, and Frau von Plattow listened gladly. She would hope for the best. So she nodded to the old woman standing there smoothing down her white apron and eager to praise her young mistress, and went down-stairs to join her husband on the terrace, where he was waiting impatiently for the arrivals. They might come now at any moment.

A week before, a very quiet wedding had bestowed upon Count Armin Hess the beautiful and much-coveted hand of Marie Louise von Plattow, a fact that surprised no one so much as it did himself. During the period of his betrothal he had paid but one visit to Ravenhorst, having been intrusted with some important diplomatic business which could not be neglected. At last, in September, he was free,—free forever,—and was determined to see his betrothed, to solve the problem in which he was so interested. It was not enough for him to possess her hand, he must win her heart. But she wrote to him with a composure that looked almost business-like, 'My grand-

parents have fixed upon the 18th for our marriage, because it is the anniversary of the wedding-day of my parents. This is perfectly agreeable to me, if you have no objection to suggest.'

Of course he had no objection, but he could not reach Ravenhorst until the 17th.

They had exchanged but few letters. Hess was a miserable correspondent, as Marie Louise knew from her cousin Magnus, who had frequently complained of the impossibility of any written intercourse with his best friend. She was reasonable and not exacting, and he,—with the best will in the world he really would hardly have known what to write to a betrothed whom he scarcely knew, and whose acceptance of his proposal had been won he scarcely knew how.

And yet the thought of her had an inexpressible charm for him,—the charm of mystery, of inscrutability. From the first moment he had felt that she was his destiny, from which he could not escape, and did not wish to escape. He calmly waited for its fulfilment.

And so he came to Ravenhorst, and the marriage was celebrated. The aged pastor performed the ceremony in the beautiful Ravenhorst church which Marie Louise, upon coming of age, had had restored. The old pastor had baptized her father fifty years before, and his voice was choked with emotion as he thought of the trials that the family had undergone since then. Armin Hess was very tender-hearted. His own eyes grew moist at sight of the old man's agitation, and this won him old Frau von Plattow's heart forever. Marie Louise was less charmed by this evidence of feeling upon the part of her betrothed. It is always incongruous when bride and bridegroom exchange

characteristics. She felt that she ought to atone for his weakness, and she stood before the altar a perfect statue of marble, glittering like ice from head to foot in stiff, shining silk, her gold-gleaming hair hidden beneath her white veil, her lovely Greek face as white as alabaster,—indeed, its pallor was almost terrifying. For to Marie Louise this step in her life was gravely important. All the struggles, all the decisive moments that had preceded this day, passed in review before her mind. She examined herself seriously, to be sure that she had nothing with which to reproach herself,—that she had acted conscientiously for the best. Her conscience was easy. Even an enemy could not accuse her of giving her consent with giddy haste or blinded by passion. No indeed. She had rejected many suitors because she really did not wish to marry. She thought she owed this to Treffenbach. When his friend appeared, recommended by Magnus himself, Count Hess could not have been more surprised by her consent than she was by his proposal. But it came as if providentially, just at a time when she was more than ever conscious that Ravenhorst needed a master. There had remained with her a dim remembrance of a handsome, taciturn man who would sit and listen for an hour at a time when she was talking with Magnus, who was kindly attentive to her grandparents, whose face wore in her memory an inquiring, investigating expression, and whose dark blue eyes rested searchingly upon her. Marie Louise was so entirely free from vanity that it never occurred to her that her rare beauty could be the object of this study. She supposed, 'He is one of those who do not find the world content them, who long for repose and seclusion, who ponder the serious problems of the age and feel

themselves drawn to us who have learned to discuss them.' The man had interested her formerly, and this interest was roused afresh. She pondered, considered, struggled with her pride that was loath to sacrifice her freedom, and gave her consent upon the same conditions that she had formerly proposed to Treffenbach.

And now she trembled as the old pastor pronounced the words of the Lutheran service: 'And he shall be thy master!'

Her master? Never! Marie Louise von Plattow recognizes no earthly master. Could not that feeble old man find words in Holy Writ that signified 'I give thee a helpmeet'?

For let him be what he might, in the end he would be what she who ruled every one chose to make him. But how if he should not be the right one? The thought brought with it a shock of terror. A silly phrase which she had once heard from Rhona Bellwitz occurred to her: 'Marriage is a lottery.' When she heard it she had turned away indignantly; now it fell heavy on her heart. She had staked her all upon a single number. Even now the fateful wheel was turning. What would her prize be? Or should she draw a blank?

When this sudden doubt assailed her she grew not only as white but as cold as marble. Her heart seemed to stand still. But this did not last. The man whom Magnus Treffenbach called friend could not but be her friend also.

It was arranged that the young couple should go to the Rhine. Count Armin wished to present his wife to his mother, whose state of health had prevented her presence at his marriage, and Marie Louise had agreed that it should be so.

Coldly and calmly she had entered the travelling-carriage, and as coldly and calmly she descended from it to-day when it drew up before the house.

"Welcome, dear children!" cried Frau von Plattow, going with outstretched arms to meet the pair.

Count Hess submitted quietly to the old lady's maternal embrace. He even stooped down that he might be patted on the shoulder and kissed on the cheek, remarking to his young wife as he did so, "Look, Molly; this is the way to do it."

She passed him with a proud glance and a shrug, and went up to present her cheek to be kissed by her grandfather.

All the old servants were assembled, Frau Doris at their head in a high muslin cap and armed with a formal congratulatory speech. Between their ranks the bride mounted the steps. Marie Louise von Plattow had always presented a distinguished appearance in her delicate, proud beauty, but as Countess Hess, on the arm of her handsome husband, she looked positively queen-like.

The young people were led to their suite of rooms by the grandparents and Frau Doris. Here the old lady turned to her grandson-in-law, and again welcomed him, her voice trembling with emotion. He took her hand and carried it to his lips: "You are too kind to me, mamma dear; all I ask is your forbearance, for I am no Magnus Treffenbach, only a very commonplace fellow, and the honour done me by Marie Louise in accepting me will forever be inexplicable to me. Still, she has done it, and my love must atone for what I lack otherwise."

As he spoke he looked at the young Countess. She was standing at her writing-table, examining the

addresses of the letters that had arrived during her absence. Her brows were contracted, her lips compressed; the expression of her face was not encouraging. She stayed where she was, whilst her husband walked on through the rooms with Frau von Plattow and admired and praised everything to please the old lady. Truth to tell, he cared very little about the rooms. In front of the endless array of books in his study he paused, and with lifted brows began, as he twisted his long moustache, to read over some of the titles,—‘Culture of the Soil,’ ‘Cattle-breeding,’ ‘Forest-laws,’ ‘Rotation of Crops,’ ‘Turnip-culture,’ ‘The Application of Guano,’ ‘Our Breed of Sheep.’ At last he began to laugh. “Good heavens, is the learning of an entire university necessary to keep a single estate in order? And Marie Louise attends to it all *en passant!* Admirable indeed!”

“We have very excellent and experienced inspectors.”

“Ah, indeed? that is well. I am an abominably lazy dog, and it would be terrible to have to read all these books.”

“Oh, all that will come of itself, I am certain,” the old lady said, kindly; “the principal consideration is that you should learn to love us a little, and be contented with us old people. My dear Armin, my husband and I took a fancy to you when we first knew you, and I have always had a presentiment that some day you would be very near to us. Now the time has come when I can call you my dear son, and I pray you to drop all formal modes of speech and address us as you would your own father and mother.”

As she spoke she was deeply moved, and her emotion

was shared by the tender-hearted man, who kissed her hand with, "A thousand thanks, mamma." The old lady then rejoined her husband, and they went down-stairs together.

As the glass door closed behind them, Count Hess was seized with an irresistible desire to laugh. The young husband had been exchanging assurances of affection with the grandmother, whilst his lovely bride, seated at her writing-table, was conning a statistical report as to the victims of brandy every year in Germany and England.

His outburst of merriment caused the Countess Marie Louise to lay aside her pamphlet and to inquire, in a tone of some annoyance, why he was laughing. She saw nothing to provoke laughter. Did the house seem to him old-fashioned and ridiculous?

"Oh, dear heart (forgive the familiar appellation), this house is charming, and your old people are most venerable. No, I took the liberty of laughing at you."

"At me?" she asked, opening wide her eyes; "and pray will you kindly tell me what you find to laugh at in me?"

"Your objectivity diverts me immensely."

She looked puzzled, and then slowly averted her glance, as if it were really not worth while to find out what he meant. She went on opening the drawers of her writing-table and arranging her books and papers, for it had been her mother's and she was now to take possession of it. Frau Doris presented herself with an armful of account-books.

"Ah, the house-books," Marie Louise said, calmly "they must be put in this drawer. These old papers must be taken away: they are letters and diaries of my mother's."

A little portfolio, tied together with ribbon, fell upon the floor; the silken string broke, and a number of small manuscript sheets were scattered here and there. Count Hess instantly stooped, as did Doris, to pick them up. Upon most of them were written simply a few caressing words. Armin saw the old housekeeper's face change, and he asked what this miniature correspondence was.

"Ah, dear me!" sighed Doris, "she was such a child,—the Countess's mother, I mean. She was always writing notes to her husband in the next room. Twenty-five years ago I was brisk enough, and I used to carry them from one room to the other and bring back the answers. There they all are together. And when he was sometimes absent in the forest or on the farms all day, she had a boy for a messenger, who used to carry him little notes written in French. Ah, I can see her now as she sat there in that window while my master was busy in his study; she would not disturb him, but would write on her little scraps of paper, and her fair curls would hang about her lovely face, and then I must come and carry the bit of paper to him and lay it on his desk just where he could see it."

Count Hess put all the sheets carefully back into the portfolio. "That's a delightful idea," he said. "Why should not we do just so, Marie Louise? What is that? Let me see!"

"I beg you, Armin, not to shake it; it seems to be a package of dried flowers," she said, impatiently. His presence worried her, as one is worried by a great boy lounging about a room meddling with this and that and interrupting one by continual questions.

"Should you not like to make the tour of the stables,

Armin? You will hear the bell ring when it is dinner-time. And would you kindly tell the inspector that I wish to see him immediately?"

"Is the inspector a young man?" he asked, gravely. "Yes? No, you must not demand such self-sacrifice of me. Allow me to take a seat in this arm-chair, and give me a paper-knife to play with,—there. Now listen, my angel: your grandmother is a charming woman; you might learn several things of her."

"What, for example?" she asked, in a resigned tone.

"How inquisitive you are! Why, for example, how to give a gracious kiss."

She looked angrily at him; a flush mantled her cheek, and she murmured, "Childish!"

"What did you say? It sounded like 'the nonsense of childish fools.' So you do not agree with me? Marie Louise,"—he looked round, but Frau Doris had left the room,—"I do not wish to seem exacting, but since your venerable shepherd of souls joined our hands in holy matrimony, you have not deigned to bestow upon me a single kind look. This is a little depressing. What have I done?"

Yes, what? She leaned her head upon her hand, and gazed with blank, tearless eyes out of the window.

Good heavens! what was she to do with this blank that the wheel of fortune had cast at her feet? For she had long since confessed to herself, with paralyzing terror, that she had made a fearful mistake,—she had become the companion for life of a man with whom she could do absolutely nothing,—a man who spent all his time from morning until night in laughing and talking of his love. It was enough to make one shed tears of blood!

"My child," he began again, after a pause, "kindly give me the letter to read which my friend Magnus wrote to you about me. I have always had a suspicion that he portrayed me to you as a weeping-willow, and that this portrait had a certain attraction for you. Confess, now, that you accepted me only because of his recommendation."

She looked steadily at him: "I accepted you because I knew that you were his friend, and because I supposed that your views coincided."

"They run precisely counter to each other."

Marie Louise pressed her hands upon her temples, and then held her head erect,—a gesture of despair.

"But, my angel, it is a fact that my views, so to speak, inconvenience no one, which is more than can be said of his."

"That means," she interrupted him, with flashing eyes, "that you have no principles; you believe nothing, you aspire to nothing, you contend for nothing."

"Granting all that you say, do you suppose that I would make horse-cloths out of your ecclesiastical embroidery, or turn your infant schools into liquor-shops?"

She looked at him contemptuously, and turned away with, "You would find such a course attended with some difficulty."

A pause ensued. If she thought she had impressed him she was disappointed. His thoughts had wandered elsewhere, and he asked very amiably, "Tell me, do you never have flowers in your rooms?"

"No, never."

"And why not?"

"I see no use in keeping plants in a room when they grow much better out of doors."

"It is a pity you should not perceive the use of it," he rejoined, dryly. "Your mother certainly had flowers here, and as certainly could now and then stick one in her husband's buttonhole or hat."

"Probably. Her youth excused her for wasting her time in such a way. But I really must beg you, Armin, to go away now, for it is time for me to dress for dinner."

He obeyed with a protest. On the threshold he turned and kissed his hand to her. A gloomy look was his only reward.

When she was alone, she stood motionless for a while in the middle of her room, and covered her eyes with her hand, conscious of a dull, weary pain. She seemed to herself betrayed, sold. Her mind was chafed by the constantly recurring question, 'What shall I do with him ?'

As if by the touch of a sorcerer's wand her entire position has been changed. She has been taken from her own old rooms and brought up here, where her repose is destroyed by an insufferable intruder. She never can be rid of him. Where she is, there he is. He watches her, annoys her, questions her; he smokes, he laughs, he chatters stupid nonsense. And he is the husband who, she had once hoped, would be her friend, her co-labourer, her sensible adviser! Instead of this she looks down upon him. What he says seems to her puerile. She cannot feel the slightest respect for his attainments. He surely never learned anything, or took interest in anything; he must have been one of those idlers who play so pitiable a part in the schools, but shine all the more brill-

liantly in society because women rave over such amiable, easy coxcombs, while a Treffenbach is passed by unheeded.

Her heart grew cold and hard, and her face wore a look of icy disdain when, half an hour afterwards, he came to take her down to dinner.

“How beautiful you are!” he said, with ardent admiration, entirely ignoring her air of tragic suffering, as he offered her his arm and conducted her down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXII

A NEW ERA AT RAVENHORST

THE worst of it was that the man was so incorrigibly merry. The old people smiled and laughed all through dinner. The inspector, too, began to laugh behind his napkin, and the housekeeper giggled audibly. The vaulted dining-hall, with its high, grated, arched windows and its carved oaken sideboards, black with age, had seen no such joyous meal for many a long year. The young Countess alone looked darkly grave. But, then, no one expected her to join in the laughter.

After dinner, the two ladies, with the Count, went out on the terrace, while the old Herr retired to the garden-hall for his siesta. Grandmamma sacrificed hers on this one day. They drank their coffee, and Marie Louise sewed, and Count Hess told of the time he had spent in Teplitz. He spoke of her beautiful Excellency, of Fräulein Violetta, of Treffenbach's

noble placability, with an ease and assurance that seemed levity to his wife. She did not wish to hear anything of those women, and yet she had to listen, for she was interested to learn how soon her prophecy had been fulfilled and Magnus had been gained over by them. She would have liked to know whether the reason for his going to South America really were to be found in his fear lest he should lose his heart entirely? Impossible! Had he not known a Marie Louise?

At last Count Hess arose, remarking that he would now inspect his future sphere of action, beginning with the stables.

They both looked after him as he walked off briskly, swinging his light cane in the air and whistling the same waltz which had so irritated Marie Louise all through their journey. His 'sphere of action'! She smiled sarcastically. He had evidently charmed her good, weak grandmother with that ridiculous phrase.

"Marie Louise," said the old lady, highly gratified, "that is a delightful fellow. Now tell me about his mother. You did not write, and you have told me nothing."

"Because there is nothing to tell. His parents live in a small villa near Cologne. His father played a rubber of whist every evening with his son and a couple of pensioned comrades, and discussed army matters. The mother is a paralytic, but she dressed very elegantly, overwhelmed me with fine phrases and flattery, and talked of the balls she had been to when she was young, and of her dear Armin's distinguished air and beautiful hands. Oh, they were three very edifying and instructive days, and just now in our busiest harvest-time! And that reminds me that I

must go and look over the books and write several letters to Berlin. There is a prospect of my being uninterrupted for an hour or two."

She was mistaken. Scarcely had she seated herself at her writing-table and begun,—

"*MY DEAR HERR CONSISTORIAL-RATH,—* Your inquiry with regard to the contribution to—" when she heard the waltz whistled on the stairs again, and immediately the monster in human form entered. "Molly," he said to this young queen, just as if she were a scullery-maid, "have you any old linen here?"

She arose silently, and, going to a wardrobe, opened a drawer filled with pieces. Count Armin followed her. She unrolled a bundle, and asked how much he wanted.

"Oh, a good deal. And have you any grease?"

"For cleaning guns, or for what? You must go to Doris," she replied, desirous only of being rid of this 'big boy' as soon as possible.

"Not for cleaning guns, but for bandaging an old woman's leg," he said, taking his cane between his teeth and tearing the linen into strips. "They have just brought an old woman into the stable whom they picked up in the forest, where she had cut her foot badly with her axe."

"Who told her to go into the forest with an axe? She was stealing wood. Did you hear her name?"

"Mother Schindler is her noble patronymic."

"Of course. She is a notorious vagabond and thief, who does not belong hereabouts at all, but over near Dreesberg. She must be taken there."

"After a while."

"Let me entreat you, Armin. You will give the people very strange ideas of your respect for the law if you befriend such a person."

"But I am sorry for the old hag. It is a terrible wound, and she has been lying in the forest twenty-four hours, and is half starved. Another time, I promise you, I will vindicate my respect for the law."

And he left the room.

She was in so depressed a mood that even this little incident irritated her. Without being aware of what she was doing, and following her train of thought, she inserted in her letter to the Consistorial-rath remarks upon the "foolish weakness and good humour which is in reality nothing but cowardice and want of resolution to suppress and condemn sin and vice. It makes life easier, of course, but such forbearance will soon increase falsehood, deceit, and thievery here." Suddenly she became conscious that all this was very much out of place in this letter, and she tore up the sheet. She was possessed by a restlessness that she did not herself understand. How could that trifling occurrence so agitate her that she was unable to carry on her correspondence correctly? It would not do. She arose and determined to open her trunk and take out some books which she had bought in Cologne. She searched for them in vain, till suddenly she remembered that Count Hess had put the package into his trunk. She went into his room, where the trunk stood, but it was still locked, although the key lay on the table. In doubt whether she should take a liberty with him which she certainly would not have allowed him to take with her, she hesitated, and her eye fell upon an old book that lay open upon the table. He had perhaps been interrupted in reading it by the

sound of the dinner-bell. She cast a half-startled glance at the yellow leaves. It was a New Testament, and her eyes fell upon the parable of the good Samaritan. She closed the book hastily, seized with a sudden dread that speedily gave place to shame. What cause was there for fear? Why should she not read those words? It really looked like an accusing conscience.

And yet her hand trembled as she tried to find the place again. As she turned over the leaves she read on the fly-leaf, "My dear, dear Armin, you will not refuse to grant your Stefanie's last request to you,—read a few verses in this book every day."

Marie Louise walked to the window, conscious of a strange oppression. She had undergone a humiliation against which her whole nature revolted, but she was too true, too honourable not to say to herself, 'You have done him wrong.'

She heard his step on the stairs, but he did not enter the study; he went to his dressing-room and rang for his servant. She would have had time enough to run away, but she stood still, struggling with her proud, hard heart, which would not submit, and yet which must submit, cost what it might; for a Marie Louise could not endure the sting of conscience. At last she heard the servant sent away, and the curtained door between the dressing-room and the study was flung open, as, whistling and with jingling spurs, Count Armin, in riding-dress and high boots, entered the room, apparently equipped for a long ride.

"Were you looking for me?" he asked, quickly, as he saw her standing by the window.

"No; but I was waiting for you. I—only—wanted to say—"

Count Armin tossed his whip, gloves, and cigar-case upon the table and came up to her, then stooped and looked into her pale face, asking, anxiously, "Are you ill?"

"No," she said, avoiding his hand; "but I am vexed, dissatisfied with myself. I have done you wrong, and I must tell you so. I could not know that—"

"But what,—what wrong have you done me?"

With a gesture she pointed to his writing-table; he looked at her inquiringly.

"You were reading, Armin, and were perhaps thinking of it when you saw the old woman. You did right; and besides, you read—"

He closed the book hastily and locked it in a drawer. "Well, yes," he said, with some embarrassment, "I once made a promise to do so; but, for heaven's sake, don't take me for a saint!"

"But you said you believed in nothing."

"Did I say that? Oh, no, my love, *you* said that. I only took the liberty of adding to your remark that at all events my views annoyed no one. No, Marie, I am far from being clever enough to take up with a philosophy invented by a Voltaire. I never could understand why people were not glad to have their catechism spare them a deal of fatiguing investigation."

A pause ensued. Marie Louise sighed. She felt ashamed, and the sensation was insufferable.

"Then you forgive me my injustice," she said, offering him her hand. "I will be careful in future."

"Ah, don't! I am so fond of forgiving," he said, kissing her on her forehead. She endured it in silence, as one submits to a deserved chastisement,—which was hardly encouraging.

"Who was the Stefanie who gave you the Testament?" she asked, after a pause.

"A young girl who grew up with me. She was almost always an invalid. You cannot imagine a more gentle spirit; and then her constant touching anxiety for the welfare of my soul! I promised her to fulfil her last request, and I have tried to keep my promise, for I should be sorry to disturb her rest in the grave. Poor little angel! She had the most beautiful eyes; otherwise she was not pretty, although attractive. Her face was thin and pale, and that set at rest my good short-sighted mother's fears. As if one could love a beautiful face if the soul informing it were not lovable!"

He looked at her musingly while he was speaking, and he came very near adding, "Yes, it is soul for which I am searching in you! You have mind, and conscience which leads you aright, and beauty in abundance, but the soul that should look out at us, warm, vital, eloquent, from those starry eyes, like the glow of an inward flame,—is that there?"

He might have said something like this, but the servant came to tell him that his horse was waiting before the door.

Count Armin returned from his ride at supper-time, and when asked where he had been, replied, with the easiest and most cheerful air possible, "Everywhere!"

For many ensuing days Marie Louise scarcely saw him. She had an abundance of time to write her letters. She frequently heard him go to his study, but he never came to her, for he was always in a hurry. Now he was out in the meadows with the labourers, now in the forest, now on the farm, and now in the sheepfold, always accompanied by the inspector. He seemed to think this all a matter of course. He had

very little to do with books. He preferred to go in the evenings and make inquiries of Herr von Plattow, and the half-blind old man fairly grew young again. He had the opportunity of imparting the valuable results of his life-long experience to a younger man, to give him counsel, and to tell him of what he had passed through. The chessmen rested quietly in their box. The two men often sat talking together far into the night, and the old Frau blessed Marie Louise's choice. As for the young Countess, she had a hard battle to fight with her pride. She was so accustomed to rule here, that it offended her to be so completely ignored at these consultations. She sometimes heard, with amazement, of buildings to be erected and improvements to be made, but no one asked her permission. And then, to be sure, it occurred to her that Count Hess's proposal had been accepted upon condition that he should undertake the management of the estate.

She still kept the books and received the inspector daily, but some day the Count would probably come and, in his nonchalant way, relieve her of this duty also.

He did come into her drawing-room one day, warm with walking and very dusty. He had with him a roll of paper, which he unrolled upon the table, and, after fastening it down at the corners, said, "Will you please to look here a moment?"

She came and leaned over the paper, across which he had drawn a line in red ink. "Why is there no straight road from the rye meadow to the farm?" he asked, looking up at her.

Marie Louise tried in vain to conceal the astonishment caused her by this simple question. She looked at him and made no reply.

"For you see, my love, thanks to the inventive faculty of your forbears, the only road by which the harvest can be gathered in passes directly over the only mountain on the estate. And in order to accomplish this the wagons must turn aside by a round-about way half a mile long."

"We are perfectly aware of this inconvenience, but the bog there——"

"But why not come in a straight line through the rye meadow?"

"Of course. How did you happen to think of it, Armin?"

"Is that surprising? Did you suppose me a candidate for the idiot-asylum? By the way, Marie Louise, I was at your school to-day."

"You? What did you want there?" she asked, coldly.

"Excuse me. After all, I am your husband. At any rate, what I *found* was that all those children have a hang-dog look. I seemed to be in the work-room of a flock of miniature criminals. Military discipline must not degenerate into dead mechanism. Can they not look as happy and merry as the children do at Velzin?"

Marie Louise was absolutely confused. This attack was so astounding that at first all she could find to say was, "Have you been in Velzin?"

"Yes; I rode over there the day before yesterday to see a setter that the farmer wants to sell, and I took occasion to visit the empty manor-house and the little colony in the park."

"I founded that school!" the young Countess said, hastily.

"It must have been long ago. It is under the

supervision of the pastor's wife, a Frau Ehrhardt,—an excellent woman, it seemed to me."

She was mute with indignation. He ventured to find fault with her arrangements, to doubt their perfection! Certainly a remarkable man. He dared what no one else dared. What if he should undertake to rule *her*? She looked at him with a frown as he pored anew over the plan on the table. At last he looked up and sighed: "I do not believe, however, that my plan could be carried out without more knowledge than I possess. I can see that. What do you say to my taking an agricultural course at a university?"

"It would be an excellent plan," she assented.

"Afterwards," he went on, reflectively, "I could take the matter in hand. Hm! I must consult with the old Herr." And he arose and left the room.

"He has aspirations, it is not to be denied," his just wife said to herself. "But I must be upon my guard; he would fain be an autocrat, and he has a skilful way of taking an adversary by surprise."

The very next day there was another surprise in the shape of a fine brown-and-white setter, which ran up-stairs beside the Count just as the young Countess was going down. "Is that your new dog?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You are not bringing him into our rooms?"

"Yes, I am. He is going to my study, where, in future, he will lie under my writing-table."

"I cannot allow that. I cannot have a dog in my rooms."

"Then he shall not go into your rooms," he rejoined, composedly, and opened the glass door. "And he cannot annoy you in mine, for you never enter them."

And thus the matter was quietly disposed of and

her commands ignored, as if they had been the result of mere girlish caprice.

She now frequently expressed her opinion that it would certainly be an advantage for him to attend soon the university course of which he had spoken.

“Yes, dearest,” he rejoined on one occasion, seating himself at her writing-table, “I must go, but not until the beginning of the winter. However, you will soon be rid of me for a week, for I am going to ride to Velzin to examine there the construction and working of a steam threshing-machine that the farmer has in operation.”

“When do you mean to go?”

“Next Monday.”

“That is the day of the conference in Berlin, which I wish to attend.”

“What conference?”

“To discuss the establishment of an asylum for the homeless poor; the Consistorial-rath A—— and Pastor R—— have both sought my h——”

“Hand?” her incorrigible husband asked, with lifted brows.

“My help,” she said, resignedly. “They wish to make me president of this institution.”

“The first step towards a reputation that culminates in an encyclopaedia. It will read very well,—‘Marie Louise von Plattow, by marriage Countess Hess, a famous philanthropist, distinguished for founding numerous orphan-asylums.’”

“Why cast ridicule upon a good cause?” she asked, coldly; “it requires no great capacity to do so.”

“Because I should like to warn you not to confound ambition and vanity with Christian charity.”

She made no reply. He was not worth it.

"For you will not be contented to go once a year to a 'conference' in Berlin, but——"

"Probably not," she interrupted him. "I should like to rent a house in Berlin for the future, that I may not trespass upon the hospitality of the Bellwitzes every time that I go there."

"Well, we will take the matter into consideration, my angel," he said, very amiably; "but now we had better go down to the old people."

"First, I should like to know whether or not you are going to Velzin on Monday?"

"Oh, yes; that arrangement cannot be altered."

"Then please let me come to my writing-table; I must inform the Consistorial-rath that the conference must be postponed."

"Have you such influence already? My child, my child, be warned. Character, personal presence, and wealth all combine to fit you to play the part of a queen among those people,—very pleasant and satisfactory. But go with me instead to Velzin, and learn from Frau Ehrhardt the magic word by which she makes a crowd of children happy."

"Perhaps you can tell me this word," she said, rather haughtily.

"Oh, yes,—it is *charity*."

"Do you think my schools were founded upon *hatred*?" she asked.

"No; upon principle."

She shrugged her shoulders and left him.

Marie Louise felt greatly relieved when she reflected that she should be rid of 'this man' for a week. He had come to be irritating to her beyond measure. On Monday he got into his little hunting-cart in the best of humours, with his dog beside him, and waved his

hand to the young Countess as he drove off, calling out to her, "A week from to-day, Molly, you can come for me."

She looked after him angrily. Then she went up to her apartments, and drew a long, long breath.

It was perfectly quiet up here. No whistling in the corridor, no jingling of spurs on the stairs, no dog's paw scratching at the doors, and more than all, no danger of being interrupted in her work. She said to herself that it would be delightful; but still it seemed strange and unusual. She sat and embroidered, or read, or wrote, and all the while she was listening to hear if somebody were not coming. But no one came. Who of the household would venture to disturb the young Countess without urgent cause? Even Frau von Plattow knew that Marie Louise liked best to be alone.

At last the silence grew oppressive. She seemed to have forgotten something down-stairs. She took her writing-materials and went down into the garden-hall. But it was already quite cool here: the wind was whirling the yellow leaves about. She shivered, put her paper and pen away, and went into the lower drawing-room, where her grandmother was sorting wools for stockings for the poor. "What is it, dear child?" she asked, kindly.

Marie Louise looked confused. She did not know what to say. "I thought I had forgotten something I am looking for."

"You might read the newspaper to your grandfather if you have time."

She was quite willing, and she read aloud to the old Herr for an hour. At last she had finished, and with a certain expectant impatience she hurried up-stairs

as if to find there what she was searching for, and walked through the empty rooms until she stood in Count Armin's study. Here she paused, looked round, and suddenly blushed. The nameless something that she was looking for was—her husband.

She missed him. Whatever he might choose to be, now she was accustomed to him, and her life was incomplete without him.

A prey to positive terror, Marie Louise sat down in the arm-chair and covered her face with her hands. This would be despicable. But it was not true, not a word of it! She had suffered humiliation enough at his hands, but this triumph should never be his. It would, indeed, be a fine affair for a Marie Louise to miss 'this man,' or his boyish gayety.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COUNT WINS

FOUR days had passed. This week seemed endless. The old Plattows observed this with many sighs, and Marie Louise thought it, but would not for worlds have uttered her thought. She was ashamed, but she could not prevent the time in her room from passing more slowly than it had ever passed before. If she took a book and tried to read, her mind wandered. She struggled against this with all the energy of her proud heart, but in vain.

One evening, as she passed through the lower hall, she noticed Frau Doris with some of the servants collected in a group and whispering together. She asked

what was the matter, and one of the servants with some hesitation replied that a carter had said that 'some one in Velzin had met with an accident in the steam-thresher.'

"A labourer!" Frau Doris interrupted the speaker hastily, with a glance of reproof.

Marie Louise mounted the staircase as erect and dignified as ever. But in her own room she grew restless. "Why had old Doris glanced in that way at the man? Suppose it were not a labourer. What if it were an inspector, or a—"

Still, she was far too proud to betray her anxiety by a second question. She allowed Doris to undress her without a word, though hoping that the old woman would speak of the accident again. But Doris said nothing. Consequently the young Countess did not close her eyes that night. Her imagination was not usually very lively, but all night long she was beset by images of terror, people with maimed, bleeding limbs, and dying eyes turned reproachfully upon her.

The next morning she felt wretchedly weak,—naturally, with so little sleep. She determined to eat a hearty breakfast and to drink a glass of Madeira. She rang for the servant, but when he came, instead of ordering breakfast, she asked, "Has anything further been heard about the accident at Velzin?"

"Nothing, my lady."

"Very well; you can go."

This day threatened to stretch out to twice its actual length. In the afternoon, seated at her writing-table, she came to a sudden determination. She would write a few words to him and ask him for news. But the 'few words.' There was the difficulty. An irresistible force guided her hand to write upon the

paper before her, 'My dear Armin.' She laid the sheet aside and began upon another, 'I am anxious, dearest Armin,'—no, that would not do. But heavens! there was paper enough. Why not write on another sheet, just to see how it looked? 'My dearest love!' She was a little nervous. This was nothing more than trying a pen.

At that moment the door was flung open, and Count Hess, in vigorous health, entered.

Marie Louise started up, pale with fright, and gazed at him. Her first impulse was to conceal the treacherous sheets of paper. She gathered them all together and thrust them into a drawer; then stood like a criminal caught in the act.

He stared, amazed, and suddenly his face grew dark. "An extraordinary reception," he said, slowly. "And a Marie Louise cannot look me in the eyes. I seem to have taken you by surprise."

She did not speak, but turned away.

Without another word he went to the table, and, opening the drawer, took out the sheets. She shyly watched him, and noticed that his hand trembled.

For a while he examined the papers one after the other, seeming not to comprehend. Suddenly he dropped them all; a flush mounted to his forehead. He came to her, took her head between his hands, gazed long into her eyes, where pride and love strove for the mastery, and asked, in a tone of gentle reproach, "What? So proud? As if it were a crime to write those words! Marie Louise, have you missed me?"

She could make no reply, but her cheek flushed crimson, and her eyes filled with tears.

"She is sorry for it,—sorry to have wasted so much feeling upon one so unworthy. Confess it. Do you

not see that I want to forgive again?" And he clasped her in his arms and kissed away her tears.

"It was only," she murmured, as if by way of excuse, "that a report frightened me. We heard that some one in Velzin had been injured by the engine, and I thought it might be you; and of course it was natural that I——" She blushed again, and extricated herself from his embrace. Steps were heard in the corridor, and Frau von Plattow entered with open arms. "He has come back! What a surprise!" she exclaimed, and nothing would do but that he must explain and narrate, and finally come down-stairs. There the tea-table stood ready, and the old people were full of joy at having their vice-son at home again. They had missed him so. The house had been as quiet as the grave.

"I can easily believe it," he said, laughing. "No one else wears such creaking boots."

"The idea of his going to the university! Nonsense!" cried the old lady.

"Nonsense or not," he rejoined, "I have written to make arrangements. Marie Louise wishes it, and her wish is my law."

Marie Louise blushed to the roots of her hair; and the more terrible it was to her to do this, the more provoked she was with 'this man,' whose fault it was.

Her grandmother sighed. If Marie Louise desired anything there was nothing to be said, for she always desired what was most sensible. But to her surprise the young Countess observed, "Perhaps, after all, it is not necessary, you have made such rapid progress in your new vocation." Count Hess bowed to the ground. "You could perhaps learn from books,—could study by yourself——"

"Ah, you ought to have said that before; now it is too late."

She was silent, and went for the chess-board. Count Hess declared himself quite ready for a game if Mario Louise would help him; he had really forgotten the moves.

"That can hardly be," she replied, almost as coldly as usual. "I must go up-stairs for some worsted."

"And I must go up for a handkerchief. Let us go together."

She said nothing, and left the room. He caught up with her upon the stairs, directly beneath the large hanging-lamp, looked into her eyes, and again saw tears in them.

"Armin."

"Well?"

"Is—is it really settled about the university? To be alone the whole winter long. My grandparents depend so upon you."

"After all, you are right. I will give up going, out of consideration for your grandmother!"

In the hall below a shadow glided past. It was Pauline, the maid, who slipped straightway into Frau Doris's room, and whispered, eagerly, "Good gracious, Frau Doris, what do you think I saw just now? The Herr Count kissing Madame! on the stairs, too! and not once, but six times at least! I felt quite ashamed!"

"Hold your silly tongue," was all that Doris had to say in reply.

Meanwhile, Herr von Plattow was thinking that it took a long time to find a handkerchief and some worsted, when Count Armin and his wife appeared without either.

The game of chess took place, however, and the old Herr won a brilliant victory.

Frau von Plattow smiled as she watched her granddaughter. Marie Louise's restlessness and pallor during her husband's absence had not escaped her, and of course she now noticed her sudden blushes, her confused smile. The old lady exulted. Everything seemed to be turning out happily; she loved him at last, and peace and harmony would reign in future.

But so hard a diamond is not easily cut. For her husband's sake Marie Louise will yield in trifles, submit to annoyances; she will confide to him her thoughts, their life shall be lived in common, and peace shall reign, so far as peace is possible. But surely no one ought to require that she should model her views upon his, or sacrifice her principles to him. And the dearer he becomes to her, the more on the watch must she be to keep her conscience clear of the blame of being false to her most sacred convictions for the sake of mere human affection.

He cares nothing for such things; they annoy him, and therefore he tries to estrange her from her missionary-work and her philanthropic schemes. What if every one should become convinced that work in Christian Associations was a source of vain ambition? Thus contests again arose, but with this difference,—she no longer talked with icy indifference and a contemptuous shrug, but with warmth, eagerly. She longed to win him over to her views. When he shared them he could really be her best and dearest friend, the helpmeet of whom, unfortunately, the Bible makes no mention.

Some weeks had passed, and Marie Louise had learned several things of which she had been ignorant

before, and which, indeed, she still regarded as weaknesses, although they became her well; how to smile, for example, and how to blush, and the art of bestowing 'a gracious kiss.' And in this last accomplishment, by the way, her grandmother had not been her preceptor.

One day, while the family were at dinner, the servant announced that a troupe of strolling players had arrived at the inn, and would like to give a representation that evening at Ravenhorst itself, if the gentlefolk would allow it.

"No!" said Marie Louise, peremptorily.

Count Hess turned to the old Herr. "What answer will you send these people?" he asked, just as if Marie Louise had not spoken. She bit her lip. Herr von Plattow said he did not wish to have any representation in the castle.

"I agree with you," said Count Armin; "but, that the people may not be disappointed entirely, I will bestow the splendour of my presence upon their performance at the inn."

"Why should you do that?" his wife asked; "this rabble has been going about the country for some days now, and such strolling players are always thievish."

"Very possibly, my darling. We all have our faults."

"Well, I must say!" Marie Louise exclaimed, indignantly.

This incident was quite forgotten, when, on a cold November morning, Count Hess looked into his wife's room to say, "Please come down, dear heart. The men have just brought a poor woman into the castle whom they found in the horse-pond, and I do not know whether she is alive or dead."

The young Countess hurried down instantly. The lower hall was filled with people talking in low tones, their voices drowned by the loud crying of a child. All made way for the young mistress, and Marie Louise saw on the floor a litter, whereon lay the unconscious form of a woman with dripping hair and drenched garments. A little boy about eight years old sat on the floor beside her, crying bitterly.

Every circumstance of the discovery was related. No one knew the woman. The boy had come running to some men at work in a barn, and had called out to them that his mamma had fallen into the water.

“The case must be advertised if she does not recover consciousness,” said the Count.

Meanwhile, the woman was carried to the kitchen, where every means were employed for her recovery, but in vain. After two hours of fruitless effort it was given up, and then the question arose, Who was she?

“A stray member of that company of players,” said the Countess, calmly; “her appearance and her dress all suggest it. Perhaps she had stayed behind and was hurrying after the others.”

The poor creature was young, with black hair and thin features. Her hands were soft and delicate; she was evidently unused to hard work. Her gown, when it was dried, proved to be shabby and worn. Her linen was fine, but the name marked upon it had been cut out everywhere. Her shoes and stockings were worn out, and her feet were blistered. In her pocket was a handkerchief tied up containing a few trinkets, most of them of little value, because the jewels that belonged to them had been picked out of the setting and were gone, but upon further search these stones were found wrapped in a paper in another pocket.

There was nothing about her that could give any clue to her identity.

All this while the boy sat on a bench by the stove and cried, cried until he fairly fell over from weariness. He made no answer when questioned ; he seemed to be utterly confused. His shoes were in holes, and his feet were bleeding ; but his dress showed a certain degree of elegance. His velvet jacket, which exposure to the weather had turned of a greenish hue, had once been black. He was frightfully dirty ; but when Frau Doris had given him a warm bath and combed his tangled curls and put him to bed, Count Armin came to look at him, and was surprised. "What a splendid boy!" he said.

"He looks like a Jewish child," said the Countess, bending over the little sleeper. "Well, to-morrow we shall learn something about him. The affair must be investigated. These trinkets are a mournful confirmation of my assertion that all these players are thievish."

The next morning, as the Count and Countess were breakfasting quite early in their apartments, the door opened, and Doris appeared, leading the boy by the hand. Frau von Plattow, who always had a plentiful supply of clothes for the poor, had provided him with a brown linen suit. Doris had tied a red ribbon around his neck under his white collar ; he looked very bright, and not at all shy. He seemed used to be among many people. There was something unusually alert and intelligent in his look. He ran about the room, attracted by everything that was pretty in it, but delighting especially in the large bright windows. "Oh," he exclaimed, "you can get out of those!"

"Out of the windows? You would come to grief, my boy."

"But there are no iron bars," he said. "Oh, how pretty they are!"

"Had you iron bars before your windows?" asked the Count.

"Oh, such thick ones! Mamma cried all the time."

"That must have been an uncomfortable house," the Count said, exchanging glances with his wife. At these words the child became confused, looked timidly around, and blushed scarlet.

Marie Louise tried to entice him to the table to give him some breakfast, but he seemed suddenly to be worried, climbed up into the window-seat, and, pressing his face against the window-panes, looked down upon the terrace. After a little he said, "The gentlemen and ladies are all gone." Then he seemed to reflect again, and was silent.

"Come here, my boy; you must be hungry," said the Count. "Come and have something to eat."

The lad looked distrustful, but approached the table slowly, with a hungry glance at the basket of biscuit, and ended by quietly eating his breakfast, only interrupting it once to say, "Will mamma stay away long?"

"Very long, my poor fellow."

His eyes filled with tears. "When did she go away? I dreamed last night that she was lying in the water, and I was cold and hungry. Have they shut her up again?"

"No, no; she is free now, and you must be good and obedient."

The boy glanced quickly from one to the other. "Come here," said Count Hess, taking him on his knee. "There will be some gentlemen here who will ask you questions, and you must answer them bravely."

"What will they ask?" the child said, and his look grew strangely suspicious.

"First, what is your name?"

Count Hess felt the little hand struggle to release itself from his firm grasp. After a long delay and much reflection, the boy said at last, "Hugo."

"That's right, Hugo. What's your other name?"

The merry childish face seemed all at once to grow old and hard. He compressed his lips. "I don't know." And this 'don't know' was all that he would say. He had no other answer for every question put to him. The more persistently he was interrogated, the more obstinately he refused to say anything save 'I don't know.'

The next day Count Hess took him to town to the police-office, where notices of what had happened had been posted. Here the boy refused to speak at all. He closed his lips, and stared vacantly before him. When his mother's clothes were shown him he looked amazed, and gazed anxiously around. When he was shown one of the trinkets, and was asked if it were his mother's, he glanced at it with dull indifference and was silent. It was impossible to tell whether he were weak-witted or cunning. He was threatened with punishment,—he was silent. They promised him toys,—he was silent. What was to be done? The simplest way was to discover the present sojourn of the strolling players. A brooch that had been found upon the woman was marked with the name of a firm of jewellers in Frankfort-on-the-Main. They were written to. Count Hess carried the boy back to Ravenhorst with him, and on the way thither tried to explain to him that his mother was dead; but either the child did not understand him, or he was stupefied from

the police examination. He seemed quite uninterested.

"Poor, unfortunate child!" said Marie Louise. "So young, and so corrupt. We will keep him here, and I will prove to you, Armin, that I have patience and Christian charity. Of course great care will be necessary, but if we wish to show ourselves in earnest with the duties we undertake, we must not expect that they will be either easy or agreeable."

She made this little speech in a somewhat dictatorial, defiant tone. She had not forgotten that he had once held up to her—to her!—as an example, Frau Ehrhardt.

Count Hess laughed, and cursorily observed that it depended upon the old people whether the boy stayed there or not. Various consultations ensued.

"I never do things by halves," said Marie Louise. "This child needs the most careful training; some one must be with him all the time. In an institution he would be ruined, but he may yet be saved. If those players are found, and it should be shown that he has no father, I will keep him here and bring him up as my son."

"I will keep him with me for a few days," Count Hess said, calmly, "and then tell you whether you may do so or not." And he patted his wife caressingly on the shoulder. She blushed, and turned away with an indignant look.

For some days afterward Count Hess had the child with him early and late. They came to be great friends. When Hess passed the boy's door in the morning the little fellow came running to meet him, hat in hand, his eyes sparkling. He would run downstairs before his friend, call the dog, rush with him

through the lower hall, and bound along in advance of the Count, always returning to his side from time to time like a faithful puppy.

Sometimes the horse stood saddled in front of the door, and then the Count would lift the boy to the saddle before him and ride off to the farm. There they would stay until dinner-time, the boy playing the while, apparently unobserved, in court-yard and barns. He was as agile as a squirrel; no tree, no hay-loft was too high for him, but he was very much afraid of cows and horses, and was at first with difficulty persuaded to allow himself to be lifted into the saddle. Once there, however, he chattered merrily, noticed everything, and asked very intelligent questions. Then he was a child like other children, frank, mischievous, true-hearted. From time to time he asked after his mother, and whether she would soon come and live too in this beautiful house. If money were given him he put it in his pocket, and Count Hess once heard him murmur as he did so, 'For mamma!' He often took it out, counted it, weighed it in his hand, and evidently took satisfaction in the glitter of the bright coins.

"Well, dear heart," Count Hess said at last, "I give you permission to keep the boy, and, if you choose, to adopt him. If he is a gypsy vagabond, I am the son of a bandit chief."

"I shall not be led astray by an attractive exterior," Marie Louise rejoined. "Believe me, I know the dark side of life better than you do. My time in Berlin among the poor and wretched was not spent in vain. In such work one learns much that is distressing. A city missionary told me of youthful criminals, convicted of theft, who, nevertheless, when they were

examined looked the very picture of innocence, which they counterfeited so as to deceive gray-headed magistrates. He told me of a lady who, in appearance belonging to the upper ranks of society, used to walk the streets with two elegantly-dressed little boys. These children were little wretches with cherub faces. They always ran on before, and used now and then to stop those whom they met to ask if they had seen their ball. The beauty and grace of the children made many a lady pause to caress them, and ask, 'What is your name?' and if afterward she missed her watch or her pocket-handkerchief she never connected the loss with those pretty children. Yes, Armin, when I think of all this I shudder at the depravity of man, and I constantly say to myself that it is wrong to sit idle when we might succour and save. Admit that I am right, Armin, in believing that true Christianity does not consist in putting away from us this evil element, but in keeping such a child with us, just because it is a lost soul and should be saved."

"Certainly, my darling; but in this case all this effort is superfluous. Have some confidence in your husband's judgment. I do not know who or what the boy's parents were; he is a strange child, I admit; but depraved he is not."

She made no reply, but looked down at her embroidery. Count Armin sat down beside her, and put his arm about her waist. "Don't look so grave," he said, kindly.

She looked at him and sighed: "Armin, I am trying my best to do what is right."

"I am sure of that, but to err is human, and I should like to keep you from harshness and injustice."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE COUNTESS LOSES

Two weeks passed, and all the advertisements and investigations on the part of the police had produced no result. Even the company of players had not been found. They were thought by some to be gone to Hanover, by others to be in Poland. Telegraphs were sent hither and thither, but all to no purpose.

Meanwhile, there appeared every likelihood that little Hugo would afford the young Countess an opportunity of carrying out her noble intentions. Hitherto the boy had given no cause for complaint, except in the fact that to all questions concerning the past he returned the same obstinate 'Don't know,' if indeed he answered at all. Usually he put on a sullen look and was mute, and the more the Countess insisted, the more sternly she spoke, the more she threatened him with punishment, the more stubborn he became. Then she tried the other method, and spoke kindly to him, telling him that he should not be punished, he should be rewarded if he replied. All in vain.

One strange incident occurred. She was one day looking out into the garden, where the boy was playing. The gardener in the distance called loudly to one of his underlings, 'Adolph, Adolph!'

The boy hurriedly threw aside what he was playing with and ran in the direction of the call, then suddenly stopped short, seemed to reflect, and returned to his play again. Marie Louise called down to him to come

to her. He obeyed. When he appeared she said quietly, but gravely, "You have told us a falsehood; your name is not Hugo." The little fellow looked at her in dismay, and became much confused.

"Your name is Adolph," she went on, looking fixedly at him.

In his first surprise the words escaped him, "Ah, how did you find out that?"

"It is enough that I know it. Now tell me why you lied to us."

Instantly the stubborn look appeared upon his face. "Don't know."

Marie Louise knew from experience that she could not get beyond those words.

She told her husband of her discovery when next she saw him, and hoped that he would now admit that she had been right. He only shrugged his shoulders. "My darling, we cannot draw any conclusions. It is true that this is the first falsehood we have detected him in, but the circumstances are so extraordinary that I would rather await further developments, and some explanation of them."

"A strange method of bringing up children! I do not understand you! Are you blind, Armin, or are you determined not to perceive the truth? Do you not see how attentive, how intelligent, how clever this child is? Just watch him stand before the old cupboard down-stairs, where the silver dishes and antique heirlooms are ranged on the shelves; how he looks at everything; how he admires everything, and wishes to know exactly the cost of each."

"His grandfather was probably a Jew peddler, my love, and has bequeathed to his grandson a little of his nose and a great deal of his preference for everything

that glitters. But both are perfectly consistent with an honourable existence, eh?"

"You cannot refrain from jesting," she said, offended. "I can only hope that my prudence and severity may prove superfluous."

But it looked as if this hope were to be disappointed, when, the next day, Count Hess returned from a long ride he noticed a stir and bustle among the servants. The gardener and his assistants were running to and fro beneath the windows of a room that looked out upon the garden, poking with long poles among the few remaining leaves of the wild vine that grew here luxuriantly against the wall. In the house the maid-servants were hurrying hither and thither.

When asked what was the matter, one of them stammered out that the old Madame had lost her watch.

The Count was startled, more by their embarrassed faces than by this information. He went directly to Frau von Plattow's room, and found the good lady in some distress. Her watch, which, as it had stopped, had been lying with the chain in an open china tray on her dressing-table, had vanished. The whole house had been searched, and in her room everything had been rummaged, because—because no one could bear to believe what the gardener and his assistants maintained. And what was this incredible assertion? The old lady sighed. They said that yesterday evening—that is in the twilight of the short autumn day—they had seen little Hugo climb into the open window, and after a little while climb out again, and then run away quickly.

Count Hess was startled: "I shall investigate this matter thoroughly. Where is the boy?"

"Up-stairs with Marie Louise. She has been questioning him."

He hurried up-stairs and into his wife's drawing-room, where he found what he had expected to see. The boy was leaning against the window-frame, and his young foster-mother was kneeling before him, so that she could look into his eyes. It would have been hard to say which of the two looked the more exhausted. The child was pale as death; her face was white as marble.

"Hugo, I entreat you now for the last time to confess the truth," she was saying, in a weary tone of resignation. "You took the watch; confess it, and you shall not be punished." The boy said not a word, but looked past her straight before him, when suddenly he perceived his friend, made a hasty movement as if to rush towards him, and fell on his face,—his hands were tied behind his back,—but he uttered no cry. Marie Louise raised him up, and stood him against the wall again. "Let him stand there, Armin. He *must* confess. Of course you have heard it all."

"But has it been proved?"

"As good as proved. Hear what the gardener has to say. There can be no doubt."

The boy's pale, tearless face never changed as she spoke. He gazed apathetically into space.

"Do not think that I have been harsh with him, Armin; I have only been patient."

The child now looked up, and in his eyes there was the mute anguish caused him by this patience, and with it a hopeless, dull expression that seemed to say, I give up all attempt to make you understand that I have done no wrong.

Count Hess felt a compassion for the boy which his wife would have called weakness, for the little thief perhaps found Marie Louise's mercy harder to endure than a sound thrashing from a hot-tempered mother.

He wanted to put an end to the matter as soon as possible, and as he knew that the boy, with the stubborn persistence of his race, would refuse to answer inquisitorial questions, he went into his own room, rang for the servants, and examined them one by one. The maid, Pauline, had seen the watch yesterday lying in the china tray, and that was all she knew about it. The gardener and his assistant had been busy trimming a hedge, when they had noticed the boy among the branches of a walnut-tree opposite the open window, and had seen him jump from the tree into it. He had remained in the room some time, and had reappeared with something in his hand, which he had tried to put into his pocket, and as he did so the glitter of some bright metal had been plainly visible. But they had had no suspicions, and the boy had run away.

The absence of the watch had been first observed by Frau von Plattow herself, and upon her dressing-table beside the little china tray there had been found a small whip which Hugo generally wore stuck in his belt.

All these facts seemed proof enough. Count Hess returned to the little delinquent, after making sure that the old lady's room had been thoroughly searched. The boy was still standing against the wall, and Marie Louise was still entreating him to confess where he had put the watch. There was dead silence on his part.

"Well, have you effected anything?" the Count asked in English.

"At first he denied stoutly having taken it."

"Come, that is something. Did he deny having been in the room?"

"No. But he said he went there to get Nero's collar. Since then he has refused to speak another word."

"Did he explain how the dog's collar could have got into that room, where neither he nor the dog ever went?"

"He said he had thrown it in through the window, and after that would say nothing more. There is the dinner-bell, Armin; I pray you go down without me. I could not eat a mouthful."

Of course the boy was to have no dinner. When Count Hess came up to the room after it was over, leaving the servants still searching the house and garden, he found matters just as he had left them.

"For heaven's sake let the boy go!" he cried, impatiently. "You look like a eorpse, and he like an idiot. I cannot bear to look at you. Let him have a flogging, if it must be, but don't kill him by slow torture, and yourself too."

"As for me," she said, quietly, "he is torturing me by his obstinacy, and if he suffers, he knows that he can be relieved by a single word."

Count Hess could not look on. He left the room. The boy's eyes followed him in silent resignation.

"Now, Hugo, I give you your choice," said the Countess, trembling so that she had to lean against the table for support. "I have wasted upon you patience, kindness, and threats. Now I give you five minutes more. If in that time you confess where you

have put the watch and chain, everything shall be forgiven and you shall not be punished. If you persist in this silence, you shall be tied, with your hands still bound together, at the foot of the staircase, where every one will see you, but no one will speak to you, and you can no longer come to our table. Do you understand me?" And she looked at the clock, her heart beating so that she could hardly pronounce the words.

Profound silence. The boy's face seemed to have lost all look of intelligence. He stared apathetically before him. All that he knew was, that when his hands were tied and he was stood here the sun shone through the window into his face; and now it was shining upon his back.

Countess Marie Louise waited, not five, but ten, fifteen minutes, and when they had passed without a word from the child, she kneeled once more before him, and implored him in a failing voice, "Only one word, Hugo, I entreat you. Tell me where you put the watch."

"Don't know," the boy said, hoarsely, looking dully at her.

Then a sacred indignation took possession of her. She lifted him in her arms and carried him down-stairs.

Meanwhile, Count Armin had questioned the servants as to whether any of them had observed the dog without his collar, but none could call to mind having missed it. At all events it was on his neck now,—a leather strap with a metal buckle and plate. Hugo had often polished this last with a woollen rag, 'to make it shine,' but the buckle was so clumsy and stiff that the boy had never before been able to take the collar off.

When the Count returned from the garden to the house, he paused in the hall. There, tied to the lower post of the balustrade of the staircase, stood the little sinner, his pale face cast down, the picture of grief and humiliation.

Every member of the household was obliged to pass by him; he was exposed to the unfeeling remarks of the servants; he was thoroughly disgraced.

Count Hess went to him, his face dark, and loosened his bonds. The boy fell on the floor scarcely conscious. Armin carried him up-stairs. In his own room he laid him on the lounge, and, pouring out a few drops of brandy from his hunting-flask, he made him drink them, soon after which the tortured child fell into a profound, heavy slumber.

Then the Count went to his wife's drawing-room, expecting to find Marie Louise exhausted on the sofa, but, although she looked ready to drop, she was standing erect by the window.

"You are ill," he said, in a cold tone. "Why do you not lie down?"

"I cannot lie down so long as that unhappy child is standing there."

"Calm yourself; I have brought him up-stairs. You have no right to subject him to punishment before his guilt is proved."

"What! can you doubt his guilt? Unfortunately, there is no room for doubt."

"Has he confessed, then? Have you the watch?"

"No."

"Then wait until you have it. In the first place, Doris must undress the boy, and give him a cup of strong bouillon, when she has put him to bed, or he will be really ill."

"Doris has gone to town to see her daughter, so I will put him to bed myself."

"You? No, thank you. That might be anything but good for the boy."

His cold tone seemed to her the bitterest injustice. She had suffered intensely, she felt miserable, and had expected to be consoled by his full, approving sympathy. How had she deserved this coldness, after having exerted the utmost patience with that obstinate child for twelve long hours? She turned away, deeply grieved, struggling with her tears.

At this moment the servant announced a visitor whose name was entirely unfamiliar to the Count. He handed the card to Marie Louise with, "Do you know this person?"

She shook her head.

"Ask the gentleman his business."

"He says, Herr Count, that he has come on account —on account of Hugo, and is very anxious to see either the Count or the Countess."

"Then show him in immediately."

A few minutes later a very well-dressed gentleman with a black moustache, his hat held under his arm, entered the drawing-room. "Pray excuse me," he said; "I come directly from Frankfort-on-the-Main, where I am in business. I come in hopes of finding my nephew here. I have discovered a clue to a very sad story through a jeweller who is known to me."

Count Hess glanced at his wife. She was ashy pale, but preserved a semblance of composure.

"A boy, calling himself Hugo, is here with us," said Hess, "and we have vainly tried to learn from him anything about his unhappy mother, who was drowned here. His persistent silence has given rise to the

suspicion that no explanation of the matter is possible."

"I learned all this in the neighbourhood," said the stranger, "and I am here to explain everything. It can be done in a few words. Adolph's mother was my sister, and she had escaped from an insane asylum."

A painful pause ensued. Marie Louise stood with downcast eyes.

"After the death of her husband," the visitor continued, "she became insane, and was taken to an institution out of town. As her malady was always aggravated by the absence of her child, the boy was allowed to be with her. She taught him to read and write, and he spent much time in the large garden of the asylum. She enjoyed a great degree of freedom, for there seemed no reason for confining her closely. But the day before her disappearance she confided to another patient in the institution that her enemies had discovered her retreat and were coming to kill her. Therefore she begged this friend not to betray who she was or where she lived. Her boy had been instructed also to keep utter silence with regard to her; henceforth she was to be called the Marquise Pompadour, and his name was to be Hugo. When her flight was discovered, every means was employed to find her, but in vain. Now I see that she must have taken the express train to Berlin, whence, her money being all gone, she wandered hither on foot,—a prey to such misery as one shrinks from imagining! I beg you to let me see my nephew."

This was a distressing moment. Marie Louise could not speak, but she still held herself proudly erect.

"The boy," said Count Hess, "is not very well, and is just now sleeping. I frankly confess to you, sir,

that I wish from my heart you had not come to-day, so that we might have had time to atone for possible injusticee. It is my painful duty to acquaint you with what has occurred, and if I can, to excuse it."

The stranger looked at him inquiringly, but before any explanation could be made Frau Doris entered. She had just returned from town, and was still in her bonnet and shawl, having come directly to her young mistress in evident ignorance of the occurrences of the day. She did not perceive the stranger, and began instantly, "I came up as soon as possible, madame, to give you these patterns, and my daughter sends her respectful duty."

"Thank you, Doris. Put them down; we will settle accounts by and by. You see we have a visitor."

"But I must not leave this little box; that belongs to Frau von Plattow."

"That—"

"Yes, yes. My old head is still good for something," the housekeeper said, with a self-satisfied smile. "Just as I was going this morning, I bethought me of Frau von Plattow's watch, the key of which was lost last week. So I took it with me, and got a new key for it. I knew that if she missed it she would guess that I had taken care of it."

Countess Marie Louise tottered, and then fell on the floor in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXV

COMO

HIS Excellency had been ordered to spend a winter in the South. No one knew exactly which famous physician, as he adjusted his gold spectacles, had prescribed this remedy, but the fact was known, and also that his fine, costly mansion had been sold, and his servants, with the exception of Friedrich and Carolina, dismissed. All this was discussed, criticised, bewailed for several weeks, and then forgotten. The world forgets quickly. Possibly General Treffenbach had reckoned upon its doing so.

The truth—known only to himself and to Violetta—was that he preferred to await his utter financial ruin in a strange land; for since his pension barely sufficed to provide her Excellency's toilettes, and his capital had been largely invaded by the payment of Madame Fouquet's debts (a chivalrous act, for which he was ridiculed by that enchanting creature), the addition to his funds resulting from the sale of his Berlin estate would of course soon be gone.

Beatrice was delighted with the journey to the South. Since her return from Teplitz she had declared herself unable to endure the air of Berlin, and undoubtedly she was far from well. Some physicians pronounced her malady intermittent fever, others nervous disarrangement; and so she dragged out her days for the most part upon the lounge. She had a preference for Como because of its vicinity to

Milan and its picturesque environs, therefore Como was selected for the winter residence; and Fräulein Emma, with many tears, set in order a pretty villa on the shores of the lake, confiding to her faithful Friedrich that this was 'a wretched nest in comparison with Berlin.'

"I have been inquiring, Friedrich, and I find that the place has only twenty-four thousand inhabitants,—quite insignificant. And what is the use of all this water? None at all. And these brown ragamuffins who are lounging about the lake all day! And her Excellency says Como is her ideal! She's forgotten what it is. She'll be surprised when she comes. Ah, if your old mistress had lived to see this!"

A few days later, when everything was in order, the family arrived. The general looked old and changed; his wife seemed to revive again. She sat in her drawing-room looking out upon the lake, and let the warm, delicious air breathe in at the open windows.

But when the first excitement was over her feverish attacks recurred, and the view of the shining mirror of the lake made her melancholy. "Call it what you please, Constantin, caprice, nerves, headache, disease of the heart, anything that you like, but find some remedy for it."

She was reclining on the lounge as she spoke, and he clasped her hand in his and sighed profoundly. "It is the reaction after all your summer gayety," he said. "After Prince Joseph's betrothal to that merry little Schönburg-Gravenstein there was no end to the Menardi festivities."

"Reaction? Oh, my dearest Constantin, could I possibly be so weak as to suffer a reaction after a few picnic-parties? No, no! You do not understand me.

The evil lies *here*." She put her hand to her forehead. "Here there is a void, a perpetual torturing pain, which affects everything,—my thoughts, my whole physical frame. I have become so indolent, so indifferent, that I should not be affected by any tidings, however frightful; and yet a buzzing fly can drive me insane. There is a fire within that demands fuel, and, finding none, searches every vein and pulse; and yet I am so weary, so dull, that it costs me a struggle to take interest in anything. Once before in my life I was affected in the same way. It was when Sir George sent me to Italy to have my voice cultivated. I was but twelve years old. The world looked glorious to me, and I was going out into it with a joyful heart. They had given me into the charge of the captain of the vessel, and in Genoa I was received by the Contellis, who were connected with the opera in Milan, and to whom Sir George had intrusted my education. As long as Italy was a vision of my imagination I was happy and healthy, but as soon as it became reality I began to sicken. I cried perpetually. I was wretched bodily and mentally, and I had this same miserable sensation of lassitude, of disappointment. What name would you give it?"

"There is a malady called homesickness."

She looked thoughtfully at him, anxious and uncertain, then suddenly began to laugh, and although it was but a shadow of her old laughter, it filled him with hope.

"But, after all, what's in a name? We will not think of it any more. Do you know what I have done to-day? I have invited some old friends here,—Mamma and Papa Contelli from Milan. They will amuse and cheer me. I long to talk of old times, and

these people are really very much attached to me. Do you remember the little fair-haired Contelli who was in Berlin with me as Violetta's singing-master and my secretary? He is a famous tenor now, and has gone to Vienna with an opera company. When I first went to the Contellis the little Tonino was in his cradle, and I used to sing him to sleep with my Italian verbs strung together in a cradle-song. Constantin, time flies fearfully fast; it sometimes fills me with horror. Life flits past us, and what does it leave? The less trouble we have, the pleasanter it is, the more swiftly it flies."

"A year ago you were complaining that it had leaden wings."

The Beatrice suddenly began to cry bitterly. Her nerves were too weak to bear even this mild contradiction.

General Treffenbach treated the sufferings as well as the whims of his beautiful wife with unvarying tenderness. He still considered it a distinguished privilege to be allowed to dry these tears.

"Do not look at me so sadly, Constantin; I do not deserve so much love. It vexes me to distress you, and yet I cannot help it!"

She dried her tears, and lay back among the cushions with closed eyes, while he sat beside her, anxious cares besieging him as he passed his hand caressingly over her loosened curls.

With what could he reproach her? Perhaps with too great love of pleasure and with waywardness,—but with nothing else. The sweetness of her disposition was exceeded only by that of her daughter, for Violetta never pouted, was never refractory. And even these defects Beatrice invested with a certain charm.

She had a warm heart, with all her apparent heartlessness. He could not ask her to be sentimental over his rheumatism, or for love of him to go into the kitchen. He was abundantly content with the bewitching smile with which she would say, 'My dearest Constantin.'

And yet he was not happy. She was extravagant, and in this respect entirely without reason or conscientee. She had drawn erroneous conclusions as to his wealth from his style of living. She did not know that he had married an heiress, but that he had had far too much delieaey, too much chivalrie sentiment, ever to hint to his wife the propriety of making a will. Frau Louise had been as ignorant and innocent as a child in sueh matters, and dying intestate, her son had inherited all that was hers.

It was of no use to acquaint Beatrice with these circumstances and their consequences. She only smiled.

Was it these cares that embittered the happiness of his life like poison distilled drop by drop into a full glass? Ah, as he looked down at her now, and saw how pale and thin the face once so blooming had become, he had but one wish,—for the wealth of a Crœsus, that he might lay it all at her feet.

He could have borne it all, however, the loss of his lofty position, the gradual withdrawal of his former friends, the vanishing of his property, but among the many saerifees that he had made to this woman one had been too great,—his son! This sacrifice he could not bear, and it was all the more unendurable since he had once hoped that the breah was entirely healed. When he perceived that he had been mistaken, bitter grief took up its abode in his heart.

A little hand was suddenly passed lightly over his grizzling hair. Violetta had glided noiselessly into the room to smile at him, and then to flit out again. On the threshold she beckoned to him. He rose cautiously and followed her.

“A letter?” he asked, in an eager whisper.

“No, no, not to-day; but something like it. The bookseller has sent us his work,—and what a work! Santa Maria! there are five volumes!”

The general sighed profoundly, and then went slowly to his study. The rooms in the villa were spacious and bright, and had been made to look wonderfully comfortable with the furniture and articles brought from Berlin. All the front windows looked out upon the lake and its encircling mountains, their purple peaks bathed in the sunshine of a southern winter.

Violetta and Fräulein Emma had taken care that the general should find in his room everything to which he had been accustomed. Upon a table lay a map of South America, upon which he was wont to travel with a pair of compasses. Travels in Brazil formed his favourite reading at present, after the letters which came thence from time to time, and furnished the general and his step-daughter with food for endless conversation. For Magnus wrote interestingly and in detail; he travelled much, and knew how to tell of his travels and studies. That he never mentioned either Violetta or Beatrice, and yet felt it necessary to assure his father at the close of every letter of his unalterable affection and devotion, pained the general more than a studied insult could have done. He now cut the string of the package,—yes, Violetta had guessed correctly. There lay the five volumes of a work which merely to look into would cause the uninitiated a

vertigo. What learning, what study, what industry were here expended! what a mass of material gathered together in the history of all the religions of the world, culminating in Christianity!

The pity was that the book was quite too learned to be read, if only because of the mingling of languages in it. Every two words of German were followed by at least three of Greek or Latin, the author appearing to consider it a matter of course that these two languages should be understood by every cultivated person. It was surely enough now and then to translate a sentence or two of Turkish or Sanskrit. The leaders of the schools would pore, spectacles on nose, over this work sentence by sentence, and with the help of various other books would perhaps understand it.

"Papa," said Violetta, timidly, "must—must we read all that?"

"God forbid!"

"Oh, I ought to be ashamed, but I can't help being glad."

Fräulein Emma appeared at the door at this moment to say that there were visitors in the drawing-room, and her Excellency wished Violetta to come immediately.

When the young girl entered the drawing-room there rose from the sofa a little gentleman and a little lady,—genuine miniature editions of humanity,—and the little lady clasped her hands over her head. "The Bimbina! Santa Lucia! The Bimbina is grown up!" And then ensued kisses, huggings, laughter, and chatter without end.

"Look, look, Pietro, I pray! The fairy has outgrown us both! She must be taller than Tonino." The little lady laughed and clapped her hands, then embraced

Violetta again, patted her cheeks, clasped her to her heart, and stood on tiptoe. "Outgrown us both! What an impudent fairy! And has forgotten us? Doesn't know Papa and Mamma Contelli? Has forgotten poor Tonino? Oh, no, no, she has not forgotten us. I compliment you upon your lovely daughter, Excellency Beatrice. The darling! the kitten!"

Her Excellency heard it all with a weary smile, and when the worthy couple had somewhat recovered from their delight, questions and answers followed one another in rapid succession.

The lively little Signora had once been a singer of some reputation, but that was long ago. She had always been an admirable little soul. She had retired from the stage many years since; hers was a domestic nature, with small care for fame or applause, and she had preferred to exercise her sweet voice in singing lullabies to eight little Contellis one after another. Heaven had bestowed upon her a husband in harmony with her in every respect, even in being a head shorter than is usual with the sons of men. But what a head there was on that small body! So grand and Jove-like that all the rest of the man looked like a mere appendage. By virtue of this head he had been incomparable upon the stage in former times in old Greek tragedies. Now he had relinquished art, and held a lucrative office under government, leaving the family laurels to be worn by his youngest son, Tonino.

These faithful souls retained all their old affection for their former foster-daughter, loving her as if she had been their own child. Signora Lucia boasted that she had made Beatrice's first marriage. Not that Bettina might not have made even then a grander match, but

that she accepted simple, honest Albert Fouquet instead of some sprig of nobility was owing to Signora Contelli's influence. "And whom is the Bimbina going to marry? Has she many adorers? Has she lost her heart yet?"

Violetta laughed, blushed, and shook her head, as her mother said, "The Bimbina is terribly fastidious. She might have married a prince, but she would not."

Frau Lucia clapped her hands again: "Pietro, Pietro, hearken, my soul! The child might have married a prince, and it is but a moment since she was in her cradle! And what will she do if she does not marry? Sing? Has she a beautiful voice? Three years ago, when Tonino came home from Berlin, the lad was very sad; he said Violetta was to be in the ballet; that her voice was sweet but too weak. Sing us a song, my child. I told Antonio then, 'Tonino, thou art an ass!' but he did not believe me, although, in truth, he is a modest lad. Come, Bimba!"

Violetta hesitated, and looked towards her mother. Beatrice's eyes were sparkling, her cheeks glowing. "Mamma cannot listen to music now," she whispered to Herr Contelli. "I have had lessons every day, but she never heard them. It makes her tremble. Poor mamma! Her nerves are so weak."

"Nonsense!" Beatrice called from her sofa. "Sing, Violetta! It will please them. Your voice"—she smiled ironically—"can hardly be so overwhelming as to prevent my listening to it for once; it is those eternal scales and trills that make me nervous."

The grand piano was in the adjoining room, which was appropriated specially to Violetta. Herr Contelli opened the instrument, and Violetta looked through

her notes,—all scores of operas. “She must be perfectly trained!” Frau Lucia exclaimed, looking over the girl’s shoulder.

“Ah, there is still much to be done. But it is my chief delight, and I had such a magnificent teacher. He belonged to the opera. I always called him Herr Meistersinger, and we had many a dispute. He is a Wagnerite, but I,” the girl concluded, with dignity, “never forgot that I was born in Milan.”

Herr Contelli was already strumming impatiently upon the piano, looking like a little lion whose prey has been offered him and then withdrawn. Violetta made haste to take her place beside him, and began to sing what he had selected.

And, in fact, if Antonio Contelli had been here, he would have hung his blond head in shame. Frau Contelli listened, entranced, to the clear liquid tones.

At this moment the door on the other side of the room leading into the passage was opened, and a muscular, broad-shouldered figure advanced cautiously on tiptoe into the room, his brown, grotesque face lit up by flashes of surprise, approval, rapture. Then he and the Signora began to nod to each other, to gesticulate, to keep time by swaying movements of their bodies, while the little woman laughed and cried, and with finger on lip said, “Sh—sh!”

Violetta saw nothing of all this. Her face turned towards the open window, she was singing with all the freshness and abandon of a young bird; but scarcely had the last note died away when there ensued one of those rapturous outbursts of applause which are possible only among enthusiastic artists. All three of her listeners shouted, wept, and fell into one another’s arms, in an ecstasy,—

"Brava! Brava! Bravissima!"

"A—h! She has the soprano of an angel!"

The little Herr Contelli outdid them all in his demonstrations; he fairly stamped upon the floor with pleasure. Violetta thought only of her delight in seeing again her kind old friend Sir George, and all were so occupied with their own emotions that no one noticed that the portière of the door leading into her Excellency's room was drawn aside, and that Beatrice's lovely figure was standing in the opening, shivering slightly as with fever. Her face was pale, with the clear pallor possible only to brunette complexions, and her large eyes, their depths glowing with a strange, feverish yearning, were gazing at the group, who in their tumultuous delight seemed to have forgotten her existence. Was it a sob, was it a low cry of pain, that sounded a discord amid the rapturous exclamations of these foolish people? No one heeded it; and Beatrice stood there thinking of a day—oh, heavens! of all the hundred days in which she too had taken part in just such moments of illimitable joy; when just such old and young fools had kissed her feet, and borne the gifted child upon their shoulders to show her to the people. Incredible moments those had been, when, in a small circle of three or four, or even six, brothers and sisters in art, little Irish Betty had sung and shamed her Italian sisters. But envy there had been none. Homage had been rendered to the beautiful, and it had evoked an inspired enthusiasm which to sober people looked like the folly of intoxication.

She stood there now feeling herself for the first time, an outcast, a captive, a fine lady, whose path in life could never again be the same as that of these

‘singer-folk.’ She grew dizzy with a sensation of despair. Ah, now she knew the name of her malady!

“Good heavens, Beatrice!” her husband’s deep, commanding voice suddenly spoke behind her, “you complain of your nerves, and yet you can endure that barbarous racket in your rooms! What in the world is the meaning of it? How you look!” he added, in dismay, as she shrank from him with eyes that were positively wild.

“Let me—let me go in!” she stammered, half unconsciously, but while he spoke he had drawn the portière close, and he now gently forced her to go back to her sofa and to lie down, bending over her in great distress. She soon recovered herself, and when he would have left her to go into the next room, she detained him. “Oh, no, Constantin, do not interrupt that innocent tumult. It is balm to my nerves.”

“But who is it? Have they quite forgotten in whose house they are?” he asked, sternly.

“Ah!” she replied, smiling, “her Excellency von Treffenbach is of small account with those people at such a moment. Violetta has been singing, that is all. Do you understand?”

“Not at all.”

Beatrice turned aside her face, and the tears rolled from beneath her closed eyelids.

All had become quiet in the other room. Violetta had probably alluded to ‘poor mamma.’ Ah, the former worshipped queen was now only ‘poor mamma!’ The beautiful woman bit her lip and murmured, “I will be well again; I will! I will!”

Violetta hurried into the room and kneeled beside her mother. “Oh, mamma,” she whispered, “I am so sorry. You have been suffering. I sent those peo-

ple away; even our dear Sir George, who will come back when you are better. I told them you must have rest."

And she brought another cushion and a soft covering, placed a little screen before the sofa, and put her arm around her mother's neck, as Beatrice burst into a fit of sobbing.

Meanwhile, the general stood at the window looking after the disturbers of the peace. The three were walking together, Sir George in the middle, with a little figure on each side of him. Signor Contelli presented a sufficiently odd appearance, with his shiny tall hat on his large head, to which the delicate little body seemed a mere appurtenance, but Sir George looked exactly like one of Gavarni's caricatures.

General Treffenbach gazed after them as they walked on, gesticulating, laughing, shrugging, and muttered beneath his gray moustache, "Play-actors!" Unfortunately, the word did not escape his wife's sharp ears.

The next day, when the general and Violetta had gone to town to visit the Cathedral, Sir George marched into her Excellency's drawing-room with all the assurance so peculiarly his own.

This time Beatrice did not run to meet him. She avoided his glance, and could not conceal that his presence was not perfectly welcome to her, for he looked keenly at her with what seemed to her a malicious air. However, he sat down, and ran both hands through his thick, dishevelled hair. "I am growing very gray, Beatrice," he said, with a sigh.

"So am I."

"And life seems to me but a poor, worthless affair."

"And to me too."

“Hush, you mocking-bird!” he rejoined, irritably. Beatrice buried her face among the sofa-cushions, and suddenly burst into a flood of tears.

“Aha!” said Sir George, rising and leaning over her. “Aha! sets the wind in that quarter?”

“My nerves,—nothing more,” she sobbed, angrily.

“Then everything is coming to an end when Beatrice would fain persuade me that she has nerves! Give it up. I know better. These are tears of remorse, child! I must have a place among the prophets, for I foretold this,—that an hour would come when you would seem to yourself an outcast, a pariah. You are standing before the closed doors of the temple; within are your life, your happiness, your friends, your art, and you can never enter there again. Your tears and sighs are in vain. You are nothing, your existence is a mere empty shell, splendour without reality. The business of your life is to be a man’s idle toy. Beatrice, Beatrice, such a woman as you was not created for this. But where is the use of talking? It is too late. Terrible words, Beatrice,—too late.”

“And why?” she exclaimed, suddenly standing erect before him in all the brilliancy of her former beauty, with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks, her small hand clinched and pressed to her heart. “Do not provoke me, Sir George, by doubting my power and dubbing me a feeble slave. If I *would* I could, but I *will not*.”

“My dear Betty, you know your husband but little, and undervalue him much. He will gladly sacrifice to you all that he possesses, but to ask of him that her Excellency von Treffenbach should tread the boards of a theatre would be too much.” He arose, went to

the door into the next room, drew aside the portière, and sat down at the piano.

At this moment Violetta entered, and whispered in terror, "Ah, there he is again; he must not play. Your poor head, dear mamma."

"Let him, let him!" her mother rejoined, lying back among her cushions again.

Sir George seemed to have forgotten that any one could hear him; he struck several mighty chords, and then broke forth with majestic force into the grand old choral, 'A mighty fortress is our God,' the old battle-song of the Lutheran Church. Involuntarily Violetta's angel tones joined in, and floated clearly above the deep accompaniment. Beatrice fled from the room. She could not bear it; that melody reminded her of some of her most glorious triumphs.

CHAPTER XXVI

MUTTERINGS OF THUNDER

THE day was waning, twilight was struggling with darkness, and lamps were needed in the apartments to reveal all the comforts that reigned there. Friedrich had just lighted those in her Excellency's drawing-room, and then, drawing aside the portière, he lighted the sconces against the wall above the piano in the next apartment. This last was done every evening, but it was generally a useless illumination.

Violetta was seated beside her mother's sofa, with

some embroidery in her lap, discussing with Beatrice the previous day, which they had passed together in Milan, where her Excellency had visited all her former acquaintances and had presented her daughter to them. A supper in the evening in a circle of brilliant men and women had ended the excursion, and had restored for the while elasticity of spirit to Beatrice's mobile temperament,—a result which was still evident as she talked the visit over with her daughter.

"Mamma, you look as fresh and lovely as you used to do," the girl said with affectionate pride. "I think you will recover entirely here. The doctor is right: it is only your nerves."

"I had a dose of admirable medicine yesterday, and to-day I am just in the mood to say to the general what I have long had on my mind; but in his ailing and irritable condition he shrinks from all mental disturbance, and never knows how to give an easy turn to a conversation."

"Oh, mamma, what do you mean?" Violetta asked, gravely. "I hope you are not going to ask for money to go to Dresden to the Menardi marriage."

"I had no intention of accepting that invitation. Who would willingly go North in January? No; I want to discuss another matter with him." And the beautiful woman rose hastily. She wanted to speak while the cheerful humour possessed her that lent such a charm to all that she said. Violetta did not follow her mother from the room, but her anxious eyes pursued her. "I am afraid," she whispered, but her mother did not hear her.

The general was sitting in his room at the table, upon which was spread out the map of South America. A coverlet lay over his knees, and his stiff arm was

well wrapped up, for a wind that had been blowing across the lake for a couple of days had brought back his old malady.

Two candles were burning on the table before him. Beatrice opened the door noiselessly, and then hesitated. He did not see her, for his face was turned from her towards the wall, where hung the portrait of his first wife, and one of his son when a boy, in hunting costume, his gun upon his shoulder. In the background the lake, the moor, and the village of Velzin showed indistinctly, as in a gray mist.

Her Excellency could see but little of her husband's face, and this little looked to her gray, thin, and old. He turned round and perceived her. His first impulse was to spring up and receive her with his usual chivalric courtesy. This was the first time she had paid him a visit in his sick-room. But she prevented his rising by hastening to his side and laying one hand upon his shoulder, while with the other she drew up a low chair, in which she placed herself opposite him, looking at him with mingled archness and melancholy. "My dear Constantin, forgive me for interrupting your sad reflections. While you are pondering upon the problem of existence here in your room I am doing the same thing in mine. Perhaps together we can discover some solution."

As she spoke she tapped the floor lightly with the heel of her little blue slipper. The general sighed, and passed his hand over his forehead.

"Do not let us be sentimental, Constantin. I must tell you frankly I cannot bear this any longer. I am ill, and there is but one cure for me, and that is freedom!"

He started, and gazed at her speechless for a mo-

ment; then his blood began to course wildly in his veins and his face flushed. "Did I understand you aright, Beatrice? Such a jest—"

"I am not jesting. It is 'to be or not to be' for us both. Stay! Please let me speak. I have cost you too dear, Constantin, for I have cost you your son. Why do you start? Do you suppose that I am so blind or so unsympathetic as not to know this? General, this grief has made you old; it eats at your very heart and undermines your health. But, dearest friend, we are quits, for I sacrificed to you what was dearest to me,—my laurels. Let me comprise in that word everything that I lost,—freedom, art, dominion, ideal aims." She leaned back and looked upward, as if the room were too confined for her.

General Treffenbach had pushed back his arm-chair and was gazing at her. She must have felt this look, calling back her rebellious spirit to his side, to duty and wisely submission. She gave a little sigh, and after a pause went on: "Can you deny what I say?" Then, when he did not answer, for pain and indignation paralyzed his tongue, she continued in a tone of good-tempered argument: "No, you cannot deny it,—it is just as I say. Well then, let me ask you if it is just or reasonable that husband and wife should so torture each other. Would it not be far better in such a case, quietly and in all kindness, to sever the tie that has come to be a galling chain?—to let me return to the stage, and to let your son return to you?"

Then he sprang to his feet, his bodily ailments all forgotten. "Beatrice! you dare to propose this to me? Do you forget that you bear my name?"

"Ah ça! How could I forget it? I have worn it

like the family diamonds, and I return it with them. Do not take so tragic a view of the matter, *mon ami*."

"Pardon me, but I am horrified at your proposal. Do you suppose for an instant that I could allow her Excellency the wife of General von Treffenbach to go upon the stage? You must entertain very extraordinary views with regard to your husband."

Then the Beatrice began to laugh, and ah! she was so bewitching, with her eyes sparkling with waywardness and good-humoured ridicule! "How unique you are, my dear Constantin! Do you imagine that I have any temptation to run off with your precious name as with a prize? Ah, I could do nothing at all with your ancient scutcheon. For who is her Excellency von Treffenbach? Nobody. But ask all Europe, 'Who is Madame Fouquet?'" She had never, perhaps, been more beautiful than as she said this with a superb toss of her head, sweeping past him towards the window, whence after a while she asked, "Well, what do you think?"

"I think," he replied, in a voice before the thunder of which she shrank, "that I am not in the mood to continue this conversation, and that I now declare once for all that I will neither consent to a separation, nor allow my wife to appear on a public stage. Have I made my meaning clear?"

He stood beside the table, his clinched fist resting upon it, the impersonation of indignant surprise, of inflexible resolve. Beatrice looked up at him admiringly: "Then I can only pity you and myself, both victims of German dulness." And, with a low courtesy, she left the room.

He sank into an arm-chair and leaned his head

upon his hands. This, then, was the end, the end of his happiness; he had sacrificed everything, everything to her, and she gave him nothing.

Violetta came running into the room: "Papa dear, it is five o'clock; dinner will soon be served, and you are neither of you dressed." She fluttered about him like a butterfly, picked up his coverlet from the floor, smoothed his hair, kissed his hand, and asked how long she should have to wait.

"Go! go! Leave me alone, all of you! You are all alike."

"Ah, you are angry with poor mamma, and she suffers so. Have patience with her."

He smiled bitterly and thrust her hand aside.

An hour afterward the little family assembled for the most silent, the most formal meal they had ever partaken of together. The general was absolutely mute. Violetta asked a timid question now and then, which remained unanswered. And her Excellency's wayward mood had given place to profound lassitude.

There had been frequent discussions as to whether or not she should accept the invitation to the marriage of Prince Joseph. The physicians were of opinion that constant amusement was the best remedy for her nervous ailments, and therefore the general had advised her acceptance of it, although every additional expense filled him with dismay. But her Excellency had hitherto found it impossible to make up her mind. Like all nervous invalids, exertion like that which must be made in going to Dresden seemed to-day impossible, and to-morrow a matter of course. Her husband's advice had roused her antagonism, and Violetta's adverse counsel had instigated her to take the

journey. In the morning she had declared that nothing should induce her to go North at this season of the year, and now as they rose from table she announced her determination to go; it would be a change, a distraction.

The general said not a word, but went to his room. The ready tears appeared in Fräulein Emma's eyes, and Violetta followed her father; for the first time in these three years the office of mediator devolved upon her.

Beatrice, in her drawing-room, paced restlessly to and fro. At last she went into the next apartment, where the lights were still burning above the piano. She drew near the instrument hesitatingly, seated herself upon the piano-stool, and gently touched the keys; a low mellow chord rang out and died away. She withdrew her hands, folded her arms upon the piano, and laid her head upon them as if utterly exhausted.

Suddenly she heard a man's step in her drawing-room: it was the general. She started up, shook off her weariness, and a ray of hope lit up her eyes. Had he come to agree to her scheme? had he perceived at last that it was but reasonable?

"Beatrice?" he said inquiringly, drawing aside the portière.

"Here I am!" And she came forward graciously to meet him, adding, eagerly, "What have you to say to me?"

"Only to ask you," he replied, coldly, "how long you intend to stay in Dresden."

She turned away disappointed: "That depends; a few weeks perhaps."

"I do not wish you to prolong your stay beyond a week."

"My lord commands," she replied, bowing after the Oriental fashion.

He seemed not to notice her sarcasm. "I cannot go with you. Shall you take Violetta?"

"If she wishes to go. But I think she would prefer to take this time for practising her singing."

"Then Carolina can go with you."

"Certainly. Is that all?"

He looked at her as if surprised, and turned away. He had spoken quietly and dictatorially. General Treffenbach had at last recovered his dignity as master of his household, in dealing with this capricious creature. Unfortunately, it was too late.

He left the room; his firm tread resounded in the corridor. What did the echo of that step speak of to the ear to which all sound had a language? Determination, contempt, wounded pride. The lion in him was aroused, and it was her fault.

Her head sank on her breast, her smile faded. This was the first time that the sun had gone down upon their wrath.

She opened the door and followed him, at first uncertainly, and then more hastily. He had just closed the door of his room after him, when she opened it again. The room was dark, and she heard him fumbling for the matches. "Who's there?" he asked.

"It is I."

"Go away, mouse; you can do no good."

"But I can bid you good-night."

"Go, go; it hurts me to hear your voice to-night. Good-night."

A small hand took the matches from him, and two arms were thrown about his neck, arms upon which chains and bracelets jingled softly, while a delicate

fragrance of orange-blossoms was wafted on the air. This was not Violetta.

“Beatrice!” he exclaimed; “what does this mean?”

“Mean?” she cried, passionately. “It means that your wife humbles herself before you, because she suffers wretchedly beneath your anger. She comes to beg for forgiveness and reconciliation, and you ask what it means.”

“How was I to know? You pained and offended me to-day with laughing lips.”

“Be kind, Constantin. Forgive me. I cannot live in discord and strife, least of all with you.”

Could he only have maintained his calm self-possession, had he only known how to deal with this strange character, he would have gone from her and have left her standing there, after assuring her with grave kindness of his forgiveness.

But who could find it in his heart to act thus? His Excellency could not. He descended immediately from his respect-compelling heights and was again a slave.

When tea was announced, and Fräulein Emma had got a fresh pocket-handkerchief ready for probable tears, while Violetta looked quite melancholy, his Excellency appeared with his wife on his arm as usual, smiling like a radiant, beneficent Jove,—poor captive man!

He atoned for his taciturnity at dinner, talking much and in the best of humours, paying her Excellency no end of little attentions. It was like a new honeymoon. The brightest sunshine had followed the tempest.

And Beatrice? She smiled a great deal and yawned a little. This capricious creature really did not know

what she wanted. Of course it was pleasanter and more peaceful to be reconciled to him; but he was decidedly more interesting in his anger.

CHAPTER XXVII

A DEPARTURE

ABOUT a week later, Sir George, who had been absent for some days, arranging for one of his restless wanderings across the sea, appeared, unannounced as usual, in her Excellency's drawing-room one evening when a lively company was grouped about the mistress of the mansion. The apartment was brilliantly illuminated. He retreated, and would have retired, but it was too late; he had been recognized, and was greeted with enthusiasm.

Her Excellency von Treffenbach was this evening entertaining, at tea in her villa, her Milan friends who had given her so cordial a reception. His Excellency was not present: he was indisposed.

Sir George, finding retreat impossible, submitted to be placed in the easiest of arm-chairs, and to have Violetta hand him a cup of tea from Fräulein Emma's tea-table. He looked haggard and worn, even more so than usual; but he plunged instantly into the conversation, which was, of course, regarding matters of art,—histrionic, operatic, and otherwise.

This evening was like one in 'the old times;' that is, when five years previously an animated circle of friends were wont to assemble in Madame Fouquet's

rooms and pass an hour or two in lively talk. The freedom that had reigned there then had never degenerated to license; the Beatrice had always held the reins in a firm grasp. She ruled the hour, and what hours they were! Learned men from abroad, poets, actors, singers, were welcomed as brothers. There were always adventures to relate, food for laughter, and sometimes for tears. For where is there such light and shade, such change from loftiest splendour to deepest misery, such close contrast of lofty aspirations and careless frivolity, as in lives devoted to art?

And to-night was an echo of those old days, only the gayety of the mistress of the mansion seemed somewhat forced and feverish. Her eyes shone with an unnatural brightness, her cheeks were burning; still, she was gracious as ever, and none noticed any change in her save Sir George, who, while she talked, watched her narrowly without seeming to do so, and who suspected in her laughter the despair which would rather laugh than weep.

This mood of hers touched a sympathetic chord in his own nature. Nevertheless, he turned with a sense of relief to Violetta, who, dressed in white, with roses in her hair, looked the lovely personification of a morning in May. She sang, and every one fell into an ecstasy; the ladies kissed her and petted her like a child, while the men did homage to her as to a future queen.

“It is a sin to bury that voice,” said Carlo Ferrati, a relative of Herr Contelli’s. “Must we lose Violetta Fouquet as well as Madame Fouquet? How have we merited this double death-blow? It is cruelty to your native country, Signorina Violetta.”

He spoke with the exaggerated expression, the passionate eagerness of a genuine Italian. Violetta's gay glance passed him by to rest upon the pictures, the bronzes, the myriad objects of value and luxury brought from Berlin, all so familiar to her for the last three years, all helping to make a home about her, and she was aware of a sensation of triumphant enjoyment. She became suddenly conscious of how safe and how sheltered she was, of the protection of a father's house, and of the difference between the world and the public seen from the windows of this home and those beheld from that gilded pillory called the stage.

"Ah, my good Signor Ferrati," she exclaimed, and there was an exultant ring in her voice, "of all imaginable impossibilities, there is none, thank heaven! so great as the appearance of Violetta Fouquet on the boards of a theatre."

Gradually the guests departed, and only two people were left at last in the brilliantly lighted room,—the hostess and Sir George. As the door closed after the last of the guests, her Excellency sank as if exhausted into an arm-chair, and leaned her head upon her hand. The light in her eyes faded, the colour on her cheek vanished, giving place to an ashy pallor, and utter weariness seemed to overpower body and soul alike.

"Well, Madame Beatrice," said Sir George, planting himself in front of her, "the comedy of Life seems irrevocably ended for you, too. What does this mean?"

She sat erect and looked at him half angrily, half in entreaty. "Ah, Sir George, for God's sake do not stand there so unfeeling, so ready to laugh at my misery!"

"And what better do you deserve?" he said, roughly.

She did not resent even this. "Ah, help me! Do you see any way of rescue for me? Every fibre of me rebels against the lingering death to which I am condemned. A thousand voices," she went on, passionately, "are calling me home,—to the home of my mind, my soul. Yes, Sir George, I am homesick. I am dying of homesickness, and no one—no one can comprehend it. My own daughter, a child of the stage, has no conception of my nature. My husband sacrifices the happiness of my life to the phantom that he calls the honour of his name, my friends stand aloof from me, and with this burning heart and brain I am alone, alone! Is what I ask a sin, a crime? Do we not pray for 'daily bread'? What does that mean? It means that which is necessary for our existence, and that is what I ask. Ah, old friend, you once rescued me from the wretched slavery of my childhood and placed me in my element. I can never forget it. My gratitude, my devotion to you for your goodness to me can end only with my life. Break the chains for me which in a moment of delusion I forged for myself. You see my pride is broken. I am weak, ill, spiritless. I can no more,—all I ask is to live!"

"Oh, shame!" he said, sternly. "Is this your love? Who once annihilated my remonstrances by the words, 'I love him'? Was that Beatrice? Did she lie then, or has her love grown cold? Grown cold! Pitiable, wretched, disgraceful!"

Her eyes flashed again: "No, no, Sir George; do not insult me. I love him now as on the day when I sacrificed my career to him. Does not every day renew the memory of that sacrifice? But love alone does not suffice me, cannot fill my heart, or my life. I answer you from your own lips,—a Beatrice was

not made for a man's plaything. Ah, you were right, Sir George. I thirst for other joys, after higher aims than any love can offer. Ah, pity me, help me!"

And she sank on her knees before him and seized his hand.

"Take care, Beatrice, take care; there is such a soft spot in this old heart of mine for the little Betty of long years ago that you might perhaps prevail with me to carry you across the seas with me now as I sent you across them then; and it would be your ruin, child. You have renounced the world where you could have reigned a queen, learn now to renounce yourself; it is your only hope. This life, thank God, cannot last forever. If I stay in Como over the morrow I will see you again, but perhaps it would be best not. If I seem harsh, Betty, it is because I think you need a sharp remedy. Good-night, and go to your husband, child." He gently raised her and led her to her couch, then turned and left her. Was this to be the end of the life he had thought to save?

She sat motionless, her hands folded in her lap, her gaze riveted on the polished floor, and a fierce conflict going on within her.

At last the servants came in to extinguish the lights. Beatrice arose slowly and went to her writing-table. "I have a note to write, Carolina," she said. "Are the trunks packed?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

"We shall start to-morrow evening, Carolina; do not forget my furs. It will be cold in—Dresden."

And then she wrote to the Princess Menardi:

"Forgive me, dear friend, if after all these weeks of uncertainty I do not come to you. There are a thou-

sand reasons why I cannot. Please do not scold me until you hear my defence, which you shall most assuredly before long.

“Yours,

BEATRICE.”

She addressed and sealed this note carefully, and then began to write again with feverish haste, often stopping to wipe away her tears. This letter she enclosed in such thick paper that it made a small packet, which she sealed but did not address. Then she arose and went very softly to the general’s room; she wished to see whether he were really suffering, or whether he had only pleaded indisposition to avoid meeting her guests.

He was still up, although the clock had just struck one. There he sat at the table upon which was the map of Brazil, his head leaning on his left hand and a pair of compasses in his right. He was very pale; the fine features looked drawn, his hand moved wearily, and he was so absorbed in thought that at first he did not hear her. When he did he rose hastily. “So late?” he asked, glancing at the cloek.

“Are you angry with me?” she asked.

“That can never be again.”

“Never?”

“Never.”

This word sufficed to make her forget in an instant all that she had just suffered. Remorse and self-abasement overpowered her; she threw herself upon his breast and wept; she seized his hand, and, before he could prevent it, covered it with kisses, and then looking up to him, whispered, “Ah, Constantin, how great, how good, how strong you are! You suffer without a moan; you endure silently the consequences

of your deeds. Your hair grows gray, your hand loses its power, but you utter no word; you never think of coward flight; you bear your fate like a hero; it never even occurs to you to shake off the creature who has caused you all this misery."

She spoke so quickly, so low, so passionately, that he only half understood her. "You know, Beatrice," he said, passing his hand caressingly over her dark curls, "that your love compensates me for all that I may have lost. But, my darling, you are feverish: your hands burn; you have over-exerted yourself; and you begin your journey to-morrow?"

"No!" she said, and hurried back to her room, where she burned everything she had written.

It was then half-past one. Her repentant mood lasted precisely twelve hours. At half-past one the next day she wrote both letters again, and when she had finished them she went to her husband, and said, in a firm voice, "Constantin, I am going to start this evening, after all. You know how vacillating I am, but now my mind is made up."

What had given firmness to her resolution was the thought, conceived during this sleepless night, that she desired only her husband's best good. It was a very happy idea, and strengthened her nerves wonderfully, for it lent to her wrong-doing the halo of a generous self-sacrifice.

And so while Friedrich was superintending the transportation of her Excellency's trunks to the railway station, and Violetta was loading her mother with loving attentions, she was going hither and thither in her rooms, arranging, shutting up, overseeing. Tom, on his gilded perch, watched his mistress for some time in silence, then burst into shrill laughter,

and, suspending himself head downward, screamed, 'Pity me; help me!'

The Beatrice, startled, threw a handkerchief at the bird to silence him.

Fräulein Emma entered the room to ask if she could in any way assist her Excellency.

Beatrice took from her pocket a little parcel, which she handed to her with a trembling hand: "Violetta is apt to forget, Emma, but I can depend upon you. In a week my husband's birthday occurs; I shall not be back by that time, but I wish him to have a little present from me on that day. Please give him this parcel, sealed just as it is."

"Your Excellency may rely upon me," said the old Fräulein, and she hurried away to place this charming little gift in security. What could it be? A cigar-case? A photograph?

In the evening the general himself, although this had been one of his bad days and he could hardly walk, accompanied his wife to the railway station. The route she was to take lay through Verona, Innsbrück, and Munich. While her husband was purchasing her tickets, Beatrice slipped a note into the post-box; it was the one she had written to the Princess Menardi telling her that she could not come to her. There were many friends and acquaintances to stand about the carriage door at the last moment; Carolina took charge of a large number of bouquets. The bell rang for departure, and every one took leave of the traveller. She had a kind and merry word for all; she embraced Violetta tenderly, still smiling; last of all came the general. He kissed her hands and wished her a happy trip. Beatrice rarely sinned against good taste, but now her principles in this re-

spirit seemed utterly to forsake her. Trembling from head to foot, scarcely mistress of herself, she clasped her arms about her husband's neck as he was about to leave her, and had he not himself unclasped them the train would have gone without her. But it bore her away, and went steaming out into the dark night, puffing like some sealy prehistoric monster; while from the window of one of the brightly-lighted coupés leaned a woman, who had unwrapped the white veil from her head to wave it—wave it until the long train vanished beneath the stars.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A BIRTHDAY GIFT

“To be given to my husband on his birthday.

“First of all, Constantin, grant me your forgiveness, and accept from me the assurance of my unalterable affection.

“Your forgiveness, because I take forcible possession of the freedom which you deny me. I know by what name this act of mine will be called, I know that the vow taken at the altar enforces slavish obedience, but, ah! a Beatrice Fouquet is not as other women are! Heartless, do you say? Oh, no, Constantin. Did you not divine the pain that tortured me when last I laid my head upon your breast and whispered farewell? It came from the conflict between my love and that

mysterious force which drags me back to the sphere to which I belong, and outside of which I cannot live.

“Love is strong, but life is stronger; I can find no other name for this force. I am incapable of the heroic endurance which alone could enable me slowly to fade away without an effort. I must save myself, and you! Yes, this act of mine will bring you, too, relief, and hereafter joy, and this thought consoles me.

“If Violetta should wish to follow me, tell her that I expect her, and that my longing for her is scarcely less than my pain for you.

“Your name I give back to you. It is Beatrice Fouquet who, when you read these lines, is on her way to New York. Do not be shocked, but rather rejoice that she has enough consideration for your family to prevent her from making Europe the theatre of her triumphs. New York! It still looks foreign, cold, and dark in my thoughts, but, as I told you, I am capable of a lofty resolve. And I do not wish to veil in mystery either the place of my destination or my manner of reaching it.

“I learned that the steamer ‘Valparaiso’ was the vessel chosen by Sir George O’Halloran for his voyage to America, and although he knows nothing as yet of my plans, he will find me among his fellow-passengers when the ‘Valparaiso’ has left the harbour.

“What will you do? Pursue me with the terror of the law? Shall I be received by the police in New York? I am not afraid. The worst that can happen to me is to be brought directly back to you, and that is not terrible.

“But I conjure you, Constantin, to let me go, and I swear to you that I never will disgrace you. Good

heavens! that a Beatrice Fouquet should have to write such words!

“With regard to Sir George I have nothing to say either in explanation or excuse. You know what he is to me, and the world has long known it.

“BEATRICE.”

General Treffenbach was alone in his room when he opened and read this letter, his charming wife's birthday gift, slowly, slowly, with failing breath and swimming brain, filled with horrible forebodings, which every word transformed to dreadful certainties, until they overpowered, overwhelmed him.

For one moment he started up and stood erect, indignant, every vein flushed with the vigour of youth, every muscle seeming of steel, and then,—then he sank down crushed; an icy coldness, a weight as of lead, disabled him; his foot refused its aid, his hand hung powerless.

Thus the double misfortune had overtaken him, leaving him nothing save the keen consciousness of his disgrace and of his ruined existence. Ah, why had not the wretched letter paralyzed his brain, burying the mind in kindly night, instead of striking down the physical frame and adding intensity to the mental apprehension?

He lay there in his arm-chair motionless, wellnigh forgetting that paralysis fettered him thus, so absorbed was his imagination by the image of his tarnished honour. The contemptuous smile of envious acquaintances, the Pharisaical pity of his friends, he could endure, but how could he survive his son's knowledge of what had taken place? A deadly horror came over him. He tried to call, but the words issued

from his lips indistinctly and with difficulty. At last he succeeded in reaching with his left hand the bell upon the table, but his arm shook and it rang but feebly,—loudly enough, however, to reach Violetta's ear; she came running into the room, but, as she approached him, stopped short in terror. Something terrible had happened here.

"Read!" he gasped forth at last. She saw the letter lying on the floor, picked it up, and read it. For some moments she stood like one stunned, then she threw herself on her knees before him and hid her face in her hands. "Oh, my father! my poor, poor father!" she cried, beside herself.

"Burn!" he said, slowly, and by a fearful effort.

She instantly threw the letter into the fire burning on the hearth, and then seized the bell and rang it loudly. Friedrich appeared immediately. "The doctor!" she exclaimed, "and quickly as you can."

The faithful fellow cast one glance at his master and rushed away for help. But Violetta kneeled beside the tortured man, and, suppressing her tears and forcing herself to speak encouragingly, whispered, "It is an attack, papa dear, that will surely pass away,—surely, surely."

He made another superhuman effort to speak. "Nothing—Brazil!"

"Oh, do not try to talk. I know what you would say. Your son shall not be written to. He would only be anxious, and in the mean while you would be so much better. No, no, we will not write. You *must* soon be better. Oh, why does not Friedrich come with the doctor!"

At last they came,—the physician, the servant, and Fräulein Emma, the last half dead with fright. But

what could they do? The physician could merely say what Violetta already knew,—that a stroke had paralyzed the right side; but he declared himself quite confident that the general would in time recover his power of speech. "As soon as the weather permits, he must go to Teplitz. Perhaps that will be of service." The words came so hesitatingly that hope faded in the minds of all. The doctor also advised telegraphing for his Excellency's wife.

At these words the hand of the patient twitched and his features worked spasmodically. "First of all, I will get you a competent nurse," the doctor said, as he took his leave; "a man who understands such cases, and who will bring you a wheeled chair and a galvanic battery."

He went, and Violetta was left alone with poor, helpless Fräulein Emma and the simple, inexperienced Friedrich, who could not restrain his sobs. The burden of life was weighing more and more heavily upon the delicate shoulders; ah, where should she find help? When the doctor came again with the nurse, she ran to her own little bedroom and locked herself in.

An hour afterwards she appeared again in the general's study. The doctor and nurse had done all that they could to alleviate his Excellency's condition, but in vain. He was now seated in the wheeled chair by the window, his body absolutely motionless, his mind filled with torturing thoughts.

Violetta took her place beside him, kissed his brow, and stroked back his gray hair. "Where were you?" he asked slowly, but more distinctly than before.

"Ah, papa dear, I have been praying. Forgive me for selfishly leaving you for so long, but—but I felt as

if I must die else. I will not do it again. You shall not miss me. I can pray here as well."

"My poor child!"

"Oh, do not say that! How could I complain? I am strong and well, and I may stay with you."

"But the future?"

"We will not think of that, papa. It will be a great deal better than you think."

"Violotta, I have—nothing left."

Ah, to be besieged by such cares at such a moment! Were illness and misery not enough?

In the course of the next few days 'such cares' pressed closely and persistently upon her young life. She learned to know them well. The first of the month was at hand. Innumerable bills were sent in; butcher, baker, tradespeople, all presented their claims; the landlord demanded the month's rent for the villa. Violetta was shocked and distressed. Should she apply to the general? There was, alas! nothing else to be done. When she entered his room he was sitting in his wheeled chair at his writing-table. With his left hand he was taking various papers out of a drawer. A little man of Jewish appearance stood beside him deliberately counting a pile of bank-notes upon the table. He received from the general a paper with a few written lines upon it, which he examined carefully and then folded and put into an old leathern pocket-book; after which, with many low bows, he withdrew. Violetta approached her father's table and laid the tradesmen's bills upon it.

"Take those," said the invalid, with a motion of his left hand towards the bank-notes.

"Oh, papa! who was that man?"

"A money-lender."

She had a vague fancy that such people were the harbingers of misfortune. . . . "Must it be? But your pension?"

"It is gone already,—for this year."

Violetta sat down and gazed at the bank-notes. It cost her a struggle to touch the money, but what else could she do? What was to be done in the future? That same little man would come one day to demand everything and to receive nothing. Then all the pictures and articles of value would have to be sold, and there might be an interval of calm. But he would come again, and the furniture would have to go too. And the physician had said that he must go to Teplitz!

Meanwhile, she could see but one way out of all this misery. Involuntarily her lips formed the words, "Ah, if Magnus only knew!" But the sick man's eyes fairly flashed, and there was the old ring of command in his voice as he said, "What! go begging to my son after what—your mother has done? Never! never! Not a word to him of all this."

That night Violetta never closed her eyes, so tormented was she by distressing thoughts. Slowly advancing upon her she saw in imagination a grim inexorable necessity. Step by step it drew near, gaining force as it came, and filling her with dread. But when she arose the next morning and made her appearance in the general's room, having vainly tried to recall the roses to her pale cheeks, her sweet face wore an expression of gentle resolve that became it well. She devoted to him the long day which no brilliancy of skies, no rippling beauty of the lake, could now brighten.

Fräulein Emma and Friedrich had hitherto been

ignorant why her Excellency, the general's wife, in spite of the illness of her husband, had given no sign of returning to her home. Every day made informing them of the truth more difficult, and at the same time more necessary. Violetta was to perform this task, and she shrank from it.

One day she received a sympathetic little note from Frau Contelli. The good little lady wrote that she had long had it in contemplation to write to the Bimbina in her mother's absence and to ask her if she would not bestow a day upon her old friend. His Excellency would surely allow her to do so. If a servant would see her put into the railway-coupé, Papa Contelli would receive her in Milan, and the entire household would keep high holiday on that day.

The general was somewhat surprised when Violetta declared that she would like to accept the invitation, but he consented. 'The child really needs some recreation. She looks like transparent wax,' he thought.

It was a strange 'recreation,' however, that Violetta was minded to take. She went to Milan the next morning by the earliest train, without sending the previous telegraph for which the Contellis had asked. She feared their inviting guests to meet her, and she wished to be alone with them. So she arrived unnoticed, and took her way on foot to their house, along the streets of the town where she had passed the happiest years of her childhood.

The Contellis inhabited a modest but very pleasant dwelling, and Frau Lucia had just said to her husband, "And no despatch from the Bimbina?" when the door opened and Violetta entered the pretty drawing-room.

There was no end to the exclamations and rejoicings. What a surprise! "Oh, heavens! Has the fairy run away from her step-father? But, holy saints above, how pale she looks! Is she ill? Does she feel faint? What has happened?"

For Violetta, overpowered by the exuberance of the welcome she received, had sunk into a chair, and could only stammer, "Oh, do not ask me to-day! I have a great favour to beg of you, and that is why I came. You will be so surprised; but I have changed my mind. I—I—want to sing in opera."

Signora Lucia clasped her plump little hands above her head in speechless amazement.

"You see," Violetta went on, recovering her self-possession, "I was very, very silly, but now I have become sensible. It would be a great pity not to use my voice. And Papa Contelli has so much influence, eh?" The last words were spoken with almost her old gayety.

"Santa Madonna!" Signora Lucia burst forth. "What does this mean? Beatrice's daughter comes to us for *our* influence. Beatrice's daughter! What has happened? Oh, tell us!—quick! quick!"

"I cannot," sighed Violetta, "I am so tired, so tired."

The pair looked at each other, completely puzzled. What did it mean? How had the child come to this determination in her mother's absence? Signora Lucia whispered at last, "Pietro, she has an unhappy love-affair. Girls always want to do something desperate when they have that."

The shadow of a smile appeared upon Violetta's pale face, to fade instantly. "Oh, do not be surprised, —help me!" she begged.

"But what shall we do?" both cried in a breath,— "we, we? As if it were necessary for Violetta Fouquet to do anything except to go to the management and say, 'Here I am!'"

"But there is a greater obstacle."

"What? What is it?"

"My father."

Again the little couple gazed helplessly at each other.

"You see, he never would give his consent if I should ask him. But I came to tell you that you must come, and must tell him that it is my calling, my vocation,—that my voice is fine, that my whole future will be brilliant and luxurious if I sing in opera. You must say this over and over again. You must tell him that you will be my parents, that you will take care of me as you once took care of mamma. Oh," she implored, raising her clasped hands, "God will reward you if you do this for me!"

CHAPTER XXIX

GONE FOREVER

VIOLETTA had long been accustomed to read the daily papers to her step-father. This was now the only bridge between his present existence and his former interests and acquaintances. If he wished to be forgotten, he did not wish to forget, although he was now in a state of such utter despair that nothing really interested him—not even the map of South

America, upon which a thin layer of dust had collected. He had but one desire,—that death might release him before his son should learn through others what had happened; before that name which would reveal all should appear in the American newspapers. A kind of rage possessed him each morning as he woko to the consciousness of the tenacious vitality of his physical frame, to the conviction that he was doomed to live on with one foot in the grave.

But if a repetition of the stroke—and such repetitions are frequent—should put a sudden end to his life, what would become of Violetta? He must provide for having the notice of his death inserted in the New York papers, that Beatrice might not delay an instant in communicating with her daughter.

To be compelled to think of all these things was like plunging the knife afresh into an open wound, and yet for the child's sake he did it. But Death, so ardently invoked, would not come to put an end to this ruined existence. He chooses his victims with wanton waywardness, turning aside from those who implore his kindly touch, and calling away those who in joyous exuberance of life and happiness have quite forgotten him.

On the day of Violetta's expedition to Milan his Excellency, with difficulty, contrived to read the paper himself. He did not wish to ask Emma to do it for him, and he doubted Friedrich's capacity, admirable nurse though he had shown himself to be. Holding the sheet in his left hand, he began slowly to study the columns until his eye fell upon the words, "*Loss of the Steamship 'Valparaiso.'*" We would mention in connection with the catastrophe of the 17th announced in our columns to-day, by which so many lives were

lost, a very improbable report that the famous cantatrice, Beatrice Fouquet, was among the passengers, and shared the unhappy fate of almost all on board."

Dead! Dead! He repeated the word mechanically, but it was only an empty sound. That blooming life extinguished, that lovely form sunk in the depths of the ocean! She had been but now here beside him; he seemed still to feel the touch of the white hand! The voice whose melody had so enchanted him—which had whispered but a few weeks ago that tearful 'farewell'—was now hushed forever!

Well, she had been dead for him from that moment. For him there was no Beatrice Treffenbach. He had been a widower since she left him. But that first death had brought with it intense bitterness,—this one held concealed a blessed balm, oblivion! The misery she had caused him was expiated. He remembered only what she had been to him. He recalled her image to his side, looked into its face, and said to it, 'Remain!'

When Violetta came home, he called her to him, stretched out his left arm, drew her to his heart, and said, gently, "My darling, lay your head here; tears will come, but they shall be shed on your father's breast. I have something very sad to tell you, and yet it is best so. God has called away your poor mother. Together we will pray for her soul's rest."

Poor child! She could hardly grow any paler, and she uttered no cry. She would not distress him by passionate lamentations. He was still her first thought. Her first words were, "Oh, my father, now you will forgive her, and that will do you good."

Henceforth she devoted herself to him more steadfastly than ever, but her smile had faded, and her merry talk was hushed, and when, alone in her room at night, kneeling at her bedside, she said the prayers with which from her earliest childhood she had begun and ended every day, she added to the prescribed words fervent entreaties for help and strength, or she leaned her head upon the hard frame of the bed, murmuring amid her tears, "Oh, mamma! my poor, beautiful mamma!" Still, even these tears she would brush from her eyes, whispering amidst her sobs, "But he is so much calmer, and he speaks of her so kindly now."

The world soon learned of the death of the beautiful woman; where and how it had taken place remained for a time shrouded in beneficent uncertainty; it was supposed by many that she had died in Germany. As soon as the Contellis heard of it they hastened to the villa, to kiss 'the poor Bimbina' and to prove their devotion by floods of tears.

At first the general refused to see 'those people,' but Violetta begged so earnestly, that for her sake he consented to allow them to be shown into his study. The conversation, carried on in French, was at first somewhat monosyllabic, but Signora Contelli soon began to tell of Beatrice's youth, now drying her tears, then laughing, and anon embracing Violetta.

"Ah, we all loved her so. You should see how inconsolable all her friends are. No one would believe it at first."

When the guests had left the room, the general remarked, "Queer little people!"

"But so faithful, so devoted."

He looked at the girl anxiously, and reflected that these Contellis might soon be Violetta's only friends.

For what would become—oh, heavens! what would become of her if he should die?

This anxiety brought the moisture to his forehead whenever it occurred to him. He could not ignore these people. He must invite them to come again, and some time he must commend Violetta to their kindly care. It would be hard, but they would of their loyalty and love take pity upon her, and he should not have to beg for her of his former friends.

“Well, Bimbina, my poor little dove, you have given up all thought of the opera now,” said the Signora Lucia when she was alone with Violetta.

The girl hesitated a moment, and then made up her mind that it were best to tell everything. The Signora would then understand and aid her. She must persist in her resolve; she could not be deterred even by her mourning for her mother.

“Oh, my angel!” the little Signora said, when she had heard it all, stroking the poor pale cheeks, and with difficulty suppressing her sobs. “I understand it perfectly now. I will speak to the general. I know what to say to him. He will say ‘yes.’ I shall tell him that your future lies in your voice. He will not wish to destroy your future.”

And Signora Contelli had an interview with the general which lasted an hour. During this time Signor Contelli made his future *protégée* sing all kinds of difficult passages and *fiorituri*, that he might judge calmly of her method and capacity. He was entirely satisfied as to her success.

At last—at last the door opened, and like a fairy godmother Signora Contelli entered, saying, “He consents.”

“Oh, my poor, poor papa,” cried Violetta; “how

he must be suffering!" And she hastened to his room.

He was sitting motionless in his wheeled chair, gazing out upon the lake, and the tears were rolling down his cheeks. When Violetta kneeled beside him and pressed her lips upon his hand he could not speak at first, and when the words came it was with almost as much effort as upon that first terrible day. "I must—I must consent to this horrible sacrifice, for I cannot stand in the way of your good fortune,—your career! I must say yes, I must let my darling child sacrifice herself, because I am too weak to help her."

In an instant Violetta's elasticity of spirit gained the upper hand. "Ah, papa, do not be so melancholy. Sacrifice! Rather scold me, and say, 'You vain, ambitious, foolish creature! People have turned your head with their talk about your angelic voice; and you imagine yourself the stuff of which famous singers are made.' There, papa, that is the way you would speak if you were a wise father."

For reply he slowly raised his hand and laid it on the girl's head as if in blessing.

From this day Violetta was more and more like her own old self,—partly because her father must not know how much she dreaded the stage, and partly because Signora Contelli had assured her that with her name and her voice she could soon earn many thousand *lire*.

They must leave this villa and go to Milan; the costly old carved cabinets, the damask furniture, the wonderful linen, the silver, all must be sold. The outside form of that which she had thought of with such fervent love as her paternal home must vanish. Henceforth she would have only a father's heart for her abiding-place; but as long as that still beat she

would not complain, and as long as her voice lasted she would not despair. Her whole life, all that she could do, belonged henceforth to the man who had lost everything through her mother. And if the debts could only be paid by her earnings in the course of a few years; if she could arrange for his going to be cured in Teplitz, should she not be more than repaid?

Meanwhile, more exact intelligence of the loss of the steamer had been received, and had spread far and wide. The disaster had been caused by a fire between-decks, and Beatrice Fouquet had been drowned, as had also the great singer's early friend and benefactor, Sir George O'Halloran, whose munificent charities in Berlin would cause his name to be cherished there always. The news circulated like lightning, setting a thousand venomous tongues in motion, and the poor, paralyzed man knew himself the object of universal contemptuous compassion. But what was this humiliating consciousness compared with the task that lay before him of informing his son of what had occurred? It must be done if he would not have Magnus learn the facts from strangers. The general laboured for three whole days at this letter. His patient young amanuensis erased, added, rewrote. Every word was well considered; and when at last they thought that they had instructed him as to their misfortune but veiled from him their misery, Violetta, shocked at the manner in which her trembling fingers had performed their duty, copied the whole letter once more. It was completed at last.

“You must have heard, my dear Magnus, of the profound sorrow in which we are plunged. Death has snatched away my wife. I cannot conceal from you that the circumstances attending my loss are so

painful to me that I find it hardly possible to dwell upon them. Beatrice had for some time been very far from well, and very unhappy. She could not control her longing for her former profession. I need not tell you how I stood affected in the matter. Death has intervened. The shock has been so great for me that my health is still further impaired; winter in the South does not suit me, and I shall hope to find relief in Tep-litz. We have been, as you know, for several months in Como, but the physicians think the vicinity of the lake very bad for me. In April I shall remove to Milan with Violetta, who has decided to appear in opera. I shall not prevent her from pursuing her vocation; they say her voice is now as fine as was her mother's. As for myself, I will not separate myself from the child while I live." Then followed answers to the questions in Treffenbach's last letter; the brevity of these answers his son would readily understand.

Some weeks later the public was startled by the announcement that Signorina Violetta Fonquet was to appear in opera on a certain night in April.

The death of the petted Beatrice was still fresh in the memory of all, and there was intense eagerness in the public mind to see her daughter.

The night came: the curtain rose, and Violetta appeared, to be greeted by a burst of applause,—that well-remembered thunder which she had hoped never to hear again. And ah! it reawakened in her the old invincible shyness, the dread of all those gazing eyes. She seemed to have had a long, long dream, of peace and rest, of a home, of a father whose strong arm protected her young life, of a brother who instructed and advised her; and this was the awakening. A dream in clear sunshine; an awakening in a gas-lit

night. And henceforth she must live in this night! She stood upon the stage like a confused child, trying to smile her thanks for her reception, her eyes filling with tears. She tried to sing; her voice failed her, and yet she *must* sing, she *must* act. Her fate, her existence, hung upon this evening.

A whisper began to circulate among the audience. "Her voice and her beauty must atone for her acting. But why is she so afraid? Madame Fouquet's daughter ought not to be timid."

Then came a distinct whisper: "Madame Fouquet's daughter is on the stage to pay the debts which her mother left behind her. Do you understand?"

In a flash this suggestion acted like an electric spark, kindling emotion, admiration, enthusiasm, in the immense audience; they clapped, they shouted, they wept. Before she had been able to sing a note, "Brava!" resounded from a hundred throats. The populace in the galleries, mindful of its former favourite, shouted encouragement. "O brava! Coraggio! Animo! Va benissimo! Coraggio!"

Thus, sustained by the ardent sympathy of her emotional public, Violetta sang and acted,—she herself scarce knew how.

When the opera was ended, and Signora Contelli had, with maternal tenderness, conducted the girl to her dressing-room, she sat for a while perfectly quiet, her hands clasped in her lap, her lovely, weary face downcast. "To-morrow it will be easier; yes, Animo!" she said at last, and, raising her head, she tried to smile.

CHAPTER XXX

AN IDYL AND AN EXILE

THEY were harvesting on the Ravenhorst meadows, which presented a peaceful picture of rustic industry. The wagons were coming and going, rolling, well laden, over the soft meadow soil, now and then swaying so that the laughing girls throned upon them screamed in pretended terror, and those on the ground below, busy with rakes, paused to look after them.

The harvest-field covered a wide area, broken here and there by groups of trees, which the axe of the conservative owners of the soil had spared. The castle could be discerned in the distance with its stately terrace, and thither were turned the eyes of the horseman who reined in his brown steed beneath a tree. His gray riding-jacket was unbuttoned, his neckerchief was carelessly knotted about his throat, and now, taking off his cap, he wiped his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief. "Infernally hot!" he ejaculated; but he looked very cheerful the while, and soon began to whistle a waltz,—a reminiscence of social brilliancy, operatic delights, and elegant leisure. It sometimes did him good to remember them all. The brown-and-white setter, that had until now been sitting still, arose at the sound of the melody, wagged his tail, and leaped up towards his master.

"Yes, Nero, old fellow, we're badly off; we had looked for some refreshment after the burden and heat of the day, but there's none to be had. No footman

with a bottle of wine, no maid with a neat little basket." He turned again towards the haymakers, and was quite absorbed in watching them, when suddenly Nero ran barking in the direction of the castle, whence approached a tall, slender figure in a light muslin gown, a white straw hat crowning her golden braids. She carried on her left arm a little basket, from beneath the cover of which protruded the neck of a wine-flask, and on her right was a sturdy, laughing little fellow, rosy as an apple, stretching out his plump baby arms and calling "Papa!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the rider, and in an instant he had sprung from his horse and hastened to meet the new-comer. "What! coming yourself? And so heavily laden! I do not know whether to fall at your feet or to scold you terribly!"

"I am bringing you mental and physical refreshment," was the smiling reply. "Which will you have first?"

"Both together," he said, laughing, taking from her child and basket at once. "Are you not tired? Has it not been too much for you?"

He looked at her somewhat anxiously, for her face, lovely as ever though it was, no longer wore the appearance of robust health which had formerly belonged to it, and the figure, too, was more delicate, and did not move with quite its former elasticity.

The child buried its chubby hands in its father's hair and called, "Papa, papa!"

"Good heavens, what was that?" asked Count Hess, as much startled as if his dog had suddenly spoken.

"My 'mental' refreshment. Come, baby, be a good boy, and say 'papa' again." "Baby" obeyed.

"That's positively too ridiculous," said Count Ar-

min. "What a colossal curiosity a fellow like this is!"

"Put him down in the hay, and take a glass of wine. There is everything in the basket."

So they sat down beneath the tree, and the child on the hay before them began to pound with his little fists the dog lying beside him, that wagged his tail and now and then licked the baby's chubby cheek.

"He has a deal of pluck," said Count Armin, as he drank his wine; "the rogue is hardly a year old."

"Ah, I am afraid he is like me," Countess Marie Louise said, with a sigh. "Look how mercilessly he is beating the dog."

"And how delightedly Nero is licking his hand!" He spoke gayly, but again he glanced at his wife with some anxiety. Her lip quivered, and there were tears in her eyes.

"A magnificent harvest," he said, by way of diverting her thoughts, "and I hope we shall get it all in without rain; or do you think that cloud looks threatening?"

But she did not look at the cloud. She leaned her head on his shoulder and put her hand in his. "Oh, Armin, how kind you are! How you try to shield and guard me when I am beset by bitter recollections!"

"You have no right to have any recollections, dear heart: the doctor has expressly forbidden them; and two years ought to have obliterated them. Enjoy the present, and the possession of so uncommonly amiable and delightful a husband as yours."

She could not help smiling, and as at this moment Armin the younger rolled over and made direct for the horse's heels, she had no time for reflections. She ran after the child, and brought it back, a roguish smile

upon its baby face, that suddenly soothed Marie Louise. "He looks wonderfully like you, Armin, and that consoles me."

The harvesters had frequently cast stolen glances towards the group beneath the shady elm, but even more interest was shown by a young man coming slowly from the castle, who paused to contemplate the picture,—the horse grazing at a little distance, the lovely woman with the sturdy child upon her lap, and the castle's lord reclining upon the grass with the indolent grace native to him, and holding up his hock-glass to see the wine sparkling in the sunlight.

It was a perfect presentment of rest and comfort after the labour of the day.

The eyes of the stranger were filled with intense melancholy. "Happy people!" he said half aloud to himself, as he leaned against the balustrade of the little bridge that spanned the meadow brook, and continued to watch the group beneath the elm. "Have I striven to attain the worthiest aims, sacrificing my time and my powers of mind to the noblest ambition, only to stand here now and gaze, devoured by envy, upon those who have done nothing save live and love? Is it not shameful that I would fain resign all that I have written and accomplished for a single hour of such rest, such happiness, such peace as they are enjoying? My life has been one of labour and of sacrifice of my own wishes: the consciousness of this ought to steel my soul, and give me strength and content. But human nature is of the earth, and earthly joys must always hover before men's eyes as the highest attainable happiness."

He walked on slowly, and was close beside the group beneath the elm before he was observed. "Tref-

fenbach, by all that is wonderful!" Count Armin exclaimed in the greatest surprise. "Am I dreaming? Marie, Marie, tell me if you see a Brazilian standing there, with a beard of jet and a skin like an Indian chief's!" And springing up, Count Hess confronted his friend, and clasped his hand warmly in both his own.

Marie Louise, her boy in her arms, held out her hand with a smile, and a blush that extended to the roots of her hair,—two things that caused Treffenbach to doubt her identity.

Questions and answers followed in rapid succession. Magnus had come from Berlin. He had been somewhat affected in health by the Brazilian climate, and his chief had insisted upon his returning to Europe for at least a year, wherefore he had come, much against his inclination.

He looked so haggard and worn that it needed no explanation to see that he had suffered from fever, but it must have been something more than physical suffering that had taken from his eyes the look of firm resolve, and had given to the features an expression of weary pain. The man so envied by the many, whose career seemed so brilliant and triumphant, looked like one who had suffered shipwreck in life and who hoped for nothing more.

Marie Louise went back to the house with her boy to give some necessary directions, and as the two friends sat together on the grass, Count Armin frankly told Magnus how and why his appearance distressed him.

"Perhaps you are right," Treffenbach said, with some bitterness. "My life is in most respects shattered, ruined, a failure, differing from that of many

others only in that they are for the most part to blame for the annihilation of their hopes, while I am the victim of fate."

Count Armin whistled softly to himself, and emptied his glass with a reflective air. "Or," he then said, "the victim of your own heroism. By Jove, Magnus, I never should have had the force of character to run away so from two charming women."

"Hush, hush, I beseech you!" said Treffenbach, hastily; his pulses throbbed. Yes—yes, there was the root of all his suffering, the sore spot in his heart.

"Forgive me, Magnus. I am and always shall be a thoughtless fellow, in spite of my blushing paternal honours. Tell me how you think she looks. Do you find her changed? Is she not very delicate and pale?"

At the moment Treffenbach's fancy was so filled with another form that it took some little time for him to collect his thoughts. "Marie Louise? She is changed, there's no denying that; but she seemed to me to look wonderfully well. What has been the matter? Is she ill?"

"Two years ago she was desperately ill; for months I was afraid she would die, and since then she has been delicate in health. I hoped she would recover entirely after the birth of her child, but she still seems frail."

"What caused her illness?"

"Oh, that is a very long story. We had taken into the house a poor boy whom we supposed to be a vagabond gypsy child, and whom we treated accordingly, but who turned out to have belonged to most respectable parents, and—well, the whole affair was distressing, and Marie Louise took it altogether too much to heart and tormented herself with self-reproaches until

she became ill. But say nothing of it to her, I beg of you."

There was a pause. Treffenbaeh looked towards the harvesters, then his glance wandered to the castle and finally to his friend. "And you are happy?"

Count Hess smiled by way of reply.

"How do you live?" asked Treffenbaeh. "Do you stay here all the year round, or do you pass the winters in Berlin?"

"We have never spent a winter there yet. I do not know what should take us there. I should hardly cut a very fine figure in society now." He laughed and held out his hand. "Look, old fellow; see how my prophecy has been fulfilled. What would the lovely Countess Mascha say to that paw?"

"Oh, I was not thinking of social amusements," Magnus said, hastily. "Marie Louise would never leave her grandparents for the sake of any such, but I thought she had an extended sphere of activity among philanthropic institutions. She laid the foundation for it that winter in Berlin when—when we were betrothed; she then became a member of various charities, writing a great deal in their favour and contributing largely to their success. A Marie Louise does not pause in such a path."

"Oh, yes, she pauses at once if her husband says, 'Stop there, my darling!'"

Magnus looked amazed. "Then she must be immensely changed, or—pardon me, Armin—you have turned out a tyrant."

"Yes, a monster, a Bluebeard, an ogre," Hess gravely assured him. "They all tremble at my nod."

"But jesting apart, Armin, you ought not to have done this. Marie Louise is a highly-gifted woman—"

"And she is also Countess von Hess; in my opinion all the rest is a secondary consideration."

"Do not imagine," Magnus said, bitterly, "that I have a word to say in defence of the so-called 'strong-minded' woman of the period. I know where she belongs. But do you estimate Marie Louise so low that you do not think she can do one duty and not leave the other undone? If so, you are far indeed from setting a true value upon the force of character by which she can rule in a wide field of action, without neglecting the smallest duty. Such women are rare, Armin, and ought not to hide their light under a bushel."

"Ravenhorst is no bushel, but a spacious mansion; and it is there that her light belongs. Just come, my dear fellow, and see how it shines. I am sure that she and her grandparents are expecting you impatiently."

They arose. Count Hess beckoned to an overseer, to whom he gave several orders and resigned the care of his horse, and then the two friends walked slowly towards the castle.

The sun was setting when they reached the terrace, where Herr and Frau von Plattow received their nephew with a cordial welcome and overwhelmed him with questions. They sat together for an hour, and then the young Countess appeared, having superintended putting her boy to bed, and they all sat down to the evening meal in the comfortable old dining-room, where Treffenbach had so often loved as a boy to sit beside his fair, silent cousin, whispering to her of the great deeds he intended to do in the future; he should certainly do something grand and noble; it was a pity that there were no longer any dragons to kill.

And now? How distorted and ruined had been the close of his youth! With what an unholy passion his heart was filled! He! the son of such a mother,—warned and guided from earliest childhood, and so calmly confident in his own strength!

“Tell us, my dear Magnus, what your plans are now,” said the old Frau, gazing at him with maternal anxiety. She thought him looking very ill. “Shall you stay in Velzin?”

“Yes, probably. I am to have a holiday in this country.”

“Are you not going to—to Italy to see your father?” This was asked with some hesitation. The subject had not been mentioned before: the thoughts it suggested were too painful.

“I do not know. I hardly know where he is just at present,” Treffenbach replied, with an effort. “Have you heard from him lately?”

No one had heard. Count Hess, after some reflection, said, “I think the pastor’s wife at Velzin takes pains always to know where they are. She is much interested in Fräulein Fouquet through a friend of hers.”

“Is it true that he is slightly paralyzed?” Magnus asked, shrinking at the sound of that word.

“It is impossible to discover the true state of affairs. But has he not told you how he is?”

“He writes me only that he is suffering. I heard elsewhere that he had had a stroke.”

There was an embarrassed silence. At last Marie Louise said, “Then you do not know that he went to Teplitz this spring. Armin’s mother, who was there, wrote us that the baths had been of great service to him—considering.”

Treffenbach said nothing; and there was another painful pause, until at last they began to talk upon indifferent subjects. He then roused himself from his reverie and turned his attention to Marie Louise, observing her with ever-increasing admiration. She might be paler and more delicate than of yore, but she was even more lovely, for her face was animated by a quick change of expression, and her clear eyes were full of cordial sympathy. If the conversation turned upon abstract matters, she was quite as much interested as formerly, and at such times her husband looked at her with an amused smile. But often when he expressed an opinion, she seemed to forget that she had any.

"Now, Treffenbach, pray ask her why we have no house in town, and why we are not conducting six benevolent institutions. Marie, you must know that he is terribly shocked at both of us, but especially at me. I have made you false to your lofty aims, and have degraded you to the sphere of the commonplace. You are a marble goddess descended from her pedestal."

Marie Louise blushed: "And I shall tell him nothing, except that such is your will and pleasure."

"There, you perceive, Treffenbach, what a domestic tyrant I am. Did you notice the resignation in her glance?"

Frau von Plattow patted Armin affectionately on the shoulder. "My dear Magnus," she said, "we owe you our special thanks for sending us this fellow. Since he came we have all grown young and gay."

After supper Count Hess took his friend up to his own rooms, since the old people were wont to retire early. The two friends smoked their cigars in the Count's study, and talked about all sorts of things in

which neither was greatly interested. Marie Louise came in for a moment.

"I'm not going to interrupt you," she said, "I have come only to bid you good-night. I am tired, and you can talk together in peace until midnight if you like. You know, Armin, where Magnus's room is, and will show him to it."

As she left the room Hess became absent and restless, and finally he rose and followed her. Treffenbach, through the open folding-doors, saw him speak with his wife in her drawing-room, and then bend down and gaze into her eyes with a look of tender anxiety, which she returned with a smile. Certainly Armin understood the art of being happy and of making others so.

CHAPTER XXXI

'THE WOUNDS OF A FRIEND'

"AND now," said Count Hess, when a few minutes later they were sitting alone together by the open window, their cigars lit and a flask of Rhine wine on the table,—"now for your affairs. No need, since I see you, to tell me how matters stand with you; it is written on your forehead. Tell me, then, my dear fellow, what prevents you from being as happy as I am?"

Treffenbach gazed out into the calm night and shrugged his shoulders. "I cannot understand your question. Is happiness a pebble lying by the wayside only waiting to be pieked up? Tell me, I pray you, where it is awaiting me, and I shall be forever your debtor."

"You know that as well as I do. Would you persuade me that you have forgotten Violetta Fouquet's eyes?"

Treffenbach shuddered. "Not a word of that!" he said, hastily.

"You behaved harshly and very cruelly when you left them never to return."

"If that be so, I alone have borne the punishment for my harshness."

"But there is still time, Magnus——"

"For what?" the other interrupted him, angrily. "For wooing a soubrette from the stage? Is that what you would propose to me?"

"No," Count Hess said, quietly; "but to lift the burden of life from the shoulders of an innocent victim."

"That is mere sentimental rubbish. Listen to me, Armin, and call common sense to your aid. I consent to speak of these things, although my entire nature revolts, although the whole affair drags upon me like some incurable disease clinging to a man and deforming him while life lasts. Let us begin at the beginning, and set sentiment aside. Let the facts speak. When my mother had been scarcely nine months in her grave my father married Madame Fouquet. Three years later Madame Fouquet ran away. Or is this not so? You see I have heard everything. That during her flight death overtook her was fortunate for us, but does not alter the fact that the Baroness Treffenbach disgraced our name. My father stayed with the daughter, who, instead of burying the name of Fouquet in the deepest oblivion, goes upon the stage, and triumphantly flaunts it abroad. When I learned this I wrote to my father that, since all ties connecting him with the mother and

daughter were thus severed, and we both stood alone again, I would come back to Europe, and we would live together, to which he replied that he never should leave his step-daughter. Now tell me yourself what happiness I can hope for. Shall I do as my poor father did, and pass through the same experience?"

"Have you finished?" asked Count Hess. "Well, then, let me speak; not of facts, indeed, but of probabilities. I have thought much of these matters, and have drawn my own conclusions, which may all be false, although I do not believe them to be so. Look you, the girl can never be a celebrity as her mother was: she has an aversion for the stage; yet she goes to Milan and sings and acts. Wherefore? Then, too, your father has never told you he was paralyzed. Strange likewise. If you had known that he had had a stroke you would undoubtedly have come to Europe to see him. He keeps the knowledge from you. They say that he is entirely helpless,—able to move only his left arm. Why has he not told you of this? It would seem that he does not want you."

"I know he does not. He no longer has any affection for his son. Those others have complete possession of his heart."

"Do not interrupt me. Did it never occur to you that Beatrice Fouquet was a woman who would have no difficulty in making away with a large fortune in a very small space of time? Are you familiar with your father's pecuniary affairs? Did you ever reflect that you were your mother's heir, but that your father's reputation as a moneyed man was based upon her wealth?"

Treffenbach felt the colour rise to his forehead. "I know nothing of my father's circumstances," he said.

"I have always supposed him a wealthy man; and then, his pension——"

"My dear fellow, have you the slightest idea of the cost of the maintenance of such an establishment as was his? And are you further aware that the Fouquet had debts, and contracted debts?"

"That, too?"

"No need to excite ourselves about it, we need only admit the fact. His anxious expression often struck me that year in Teplitz. It could not surely have escaped you, his son?"

"He never admitted me to his confidence," Treffenbach rejoined, gloomily.

"Nor me."

There was a pause. Treffenbach sighed, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Then you think——"

"I think," Count Hess interrupted him with a fervour quite rare with him, "that he is now at the end of his finances. I think everything was lost in the shipwreck of his life,—honour, happiness, health, money. I think that his 'residence in the South' was his way of burying his misery, of vanishing from the world and from the memory of his friends; but more than all is he resolved to hide his mental and pecuniary ruin from his son. For this son has but one fault, —he is too virtuous. The escapades of a Beatrice, the theatrical career of her daughter, must never be brought into court where he is judge. The only thing that he can do for this son is to die as soon and in as great seclusion as possible, in order that this whole episode, so little conducive to the honour of the Treffenbachs, may be buried in the sea of oblivion, above which the son's fame may shine in full perfection. And to this

end he starves, and suffers, and foregoes the best that life has ever offered him,—the society of his son, whom he loves beyond aught else, for whose presence he can never cease to long."

"You torture me!" Treffenbach exclaimed, starting up.

"Then let me give you one consolation. In all this misery he has not been alone. An angel has stood beside him, a sylph with seraph's wings consoled him, strengthened him, loved him, understood him, endured everything with him, cheered him in his dark hours, and nursed him in illness, and since she saw no other way out of the labyrinth of debt and want, did what she could for him and sold her voice. And if all these probabilities of mine should prove to be certainties, she has done more than you or I in our whole lives have ever done, and if I were a free man, with a free heart, I should go south by the next express, and lay heart, hand, and everything that I possessed at her feet!"

Treffenbach covered his face with his hands. "You crush me to the earth, Armin," he murmured. "Do you know it?"

"Yes; and I know, too, that your pride will, perhaps, never forgive me for so doing," the other replied, rising,—"that we may, perhaps, be friends no longer; but I can do no otherwise."

"No!" exclaimed Magnus, springing up, and taking Armin's hands in his own. "No; while life lasts I shall never cease to be grateful to you for opening my eyes, for showing me myself as I am."

They stood thus for a moment, hand clasped in hand, their hearts filled with memories of a life-long friendship, and then Armin conducted Magnus to his room. There was nothing more to be said.

When the Count afterwards looked into the nursery, he found Marie Louise there in a white peignoir, sitting by her boy's cradle, the golden abundance of her hair loose about her. "So soon?" she asked, surprised. "Has Magnus gone to bed already?"

"Yes." Her husband came and sat down beside her, propping his head on his hand, and gazing thoughtfully before him. "It is so fine in both of you, in him and in you, that your pursuit of the truth is so upright and honest that you are really grateful to those who relentlessly tell it to you. Poor fellow! I am afraid he'll not sleep to-night. Distress of mind, remorse, and an invincible passion will all lay siege to him."

"Oh, I wish I could do something to make him happier! I never can forget how coldly and unsympathetically I once left him in his despair."

"Well, you can do something," he said, with a searching look into her eyes.

"Oh, tell me what!"

"Write to Violetta Fouquet to come and spend her holidays (they begin soon now) with us, instead of starring it."

There was a short silence. Marie Louise coloured, and seemed to struggle with herself.

"My poor darling," he said, compassionately, "it is too much to ask of you. I will not do it."

"But you wish it?"

"Yes; for his sake."

"Then it shall be done. If you would do it for his sake, I can surely do it for yours."

When Treffenbach made his appearance the next morning, he looked so pale and grave that all pitied him; and, moreover, he was restless and preoccupied

until the conveyance which he had ordered from Velzin came to carry him thither.

He spent the day there alone in the old house. Towards evening he went out and stood upon the marble rampart at the bottom of the garden, at the foot of which the gentle waves of the lake plashed softly. It was the season of roses, Velzin's loveliest time. The gray old house was all wreathed over with trailing branches, heavy with the pink clusters; the garden was wilder than ever, and myriads of rose-leaves were floating upon the near surface of the lake.

What were his thoughts as he stood gazing down into the water as if to search its depths? Perhaps he recalled the half-forgotten childish tale, and saw below there the castle of gold, ruby, and ivory, and the king lamenting, and the black-tressed naiad gliding by, crowned with lilies, half-fish, half-woman, beautiful, soulless, with her intoxicating smile.

Perhaps, too, he wondered whether his whole life had not been a mistake;—whether he had not been searching for the mote in his neighbour's eye, unconscious of the beam in his own;—or whether he had not striven after lofty aims and neglected the duty lying nearest him? And at last there occurred to him a verse in praise of charity,—the greatest of all lofty virtues, before which even faith and hope fade.

As the twilight darkened, he took his way, as was his wont, to the pastor's cottage, where, upon his return, he had found Frau Ehrhardt the same true, faithful friend that she had always been to him, as to his mother. In his previous interview with her upon his arrival in Velzin, not one word had been exchanged between them with regard to his father. There had been much to tell of the success of the schools his

mother had established, and of the pastor's flock in the village and his own small flock at home, where Hanna had come to be a most attractive maiden, and her mother's right hand in the parsonage and in the parish. But to-night he sought the cottage with but one thought, to learn, if he might, his father's address.

Fortunately, he found Frau Ehrhardt alone. Hanna had gone with her father upon an errand to the village, and the younger children had not yet come in from their twilight play in the garden. In a few words, for he could not speak even to this true friend of what had filled his mind all through this day, he told her that he was going to his father, and confessed that he was in ignorance of where in Italy he was at present, although he knew that Violetta had gone upon the stage in Milan.

Without a word the pastor's wife produced from her desk her last letter from her friend Frau Forstmann; a letter that told a sad tale in spite of the writer's evident ignorance of the actual life of her 'dear young Fräulein.' It answered Treffenbach's question, and when he left the parsonage shortly afterwards, he carried it with him.

CHAPTER XXXII

IL PALAZZO BELLONI

THREE days later Treffenbach reached Milan as the evening was setting in, and drove through the streets to the address that had been given him by the pastor's wife. Whether it was the effect of the rainy summer evening, or of his own mood, certain it is that the brilliant, beautiful city seemed to him miserably gloomy and sad. The fiacre finally turned into a dark street in the ancient quarter of the town, and drew up before a tall mansion, the exterior of which presented a melancholy picture of former grandeur and present decay.

Many of the window-panes were wanting or partly broken, and the holes were stuffed with paper or straw. The walls were defaced by cracks here and there, while ornaments and rosettes of a rare, yellowish marble were set in the arches of the windows.

"This cannot be the house," said Treffenbach, in but indifferent Italian.

"Oh, *sicuro, sicuro!* this is the house,—the Palazzo Belloni."

Treffenbach sighed and got out of the conveyance. An old woman opened the door for him, gazed at him in surprise, and then returned to a small room intended for the concierge, where she was eating her polenta by the light of an oil-lamp.

His footsteps echoed in the spacious vaulted hall; he ascended the staircase, which was of splendid pro-

portions; a silence as of death prevailed, and it all looked deserted and ruinous. The marble stairs were cracked in places; a piece of the ceiling had fallen, and the frescoed walls showed only spots of colour here and there, like islands amid the crumbling plaster. Apparently this was an ancient palace,—long uninhabited, and not thought worthy of restoration.

Before a door on the first landing a small lamp was burning; there was nothing else to guide a visitor. Treffenbach discovered a bell-handle, which he pulled, and at the shrill sound the door was cautiously opened, and a round, ruddy face, beneath a shock of flaxen hair, peeped through the crack, drew back, and then appeared again.

“Friedrich!” Treffenbach said, quietly.

“Herr—Herr—Baron!”

“Yes, it is I. Open the door.”

“Saints above!” the servant cried, in a stifled voice, “how shall we ever tell him?”

“Is my father so ill?”

“Ah, Herr Baron, not more ill than usual, but this is such a surprise. We—we—ah, Herr Baron, no one can tell you how—but come in.” And the faithful fellow almost sobbed. “I will go to his Excellency and try to keep him from being too much startled.”

He conducted Treffenbach to a large, dim room. High uncurtained windows shone gray in the darkness. Magnus could distinguish some high-backed chairs with carved arms standing here and there against the walls, could see a huge chimney-piece, and felt beneath his feet the chill of a marble floor; all increasing the sense of discomfort which had distressed him from the moment of his arrival.

Meanwhile, Friedrich had opened the tall folding-

doors opposite, and Treffenbach heard him say, "Your Excellency—we—I—it——"

"What is the matter?" the familiar voice exclaimed. "Friedrich! how you look! What has happened?"

"Oh, nothing, your Excellency; 'tis—'tis something very pleasant!"

"Then your looks belie you."

"Because I don't know how to tell your Excellency. Some one has come."

A long pause ensued. At last the general's voice said, in a wavering tone, "Is it my son?"

"Now, Herr Baron, you may come in," Friedrich called, with a lately acquired familiarity of manner, which told more distinctly than aught else could have done of the poverty that levels the barrier between master and servant.

Treffenbach at once entered a second spacious, lofty apartment, almost entirely empty. In one corner—it looked a mile off—stood the campaign-bed which always accompanied the once gallant soldier; he hoped at least to die upon it, since a glorious death upon the battle-field had been denied him.

Near a window, beside a table piled with books and papers, stood the general's wheeled chair. If the father hardly knew whether he felt more of joy or of pain in this meeting, the son's sensations were those of overwhelming sadness. He could scarcely speak when he saw before him the shrunken figure, the deeply-lined face of the father who had always been to him the personification of athletic vigour. "Oh, sir, oh, father! I have but one miserable excuse for my delay in coming to you,—my ignorance of your illness, of your condition. Armin Hess divined it when I did not!"

The general lifted his left hand and laid it, a leaden

weight, upon his son's shoulder: "Do not reproach yourself, my boy; it was best to keep you in ignorance. I wished to spare you this sight. I hoped you would have received tidings of my death, but I cannot die. Here you are now, however, and I am glad of it. I have wished it of late for her sake, for she is killing herself for me." He paused, overcome by pain and agitation; he seemed scarcely to see his son, but to be occupied with other thoughts, which had filled his lonely hours with anxiety. "She is wearing her life away. That cough of hers kills me, and there is nothing to be done. The little witch is stronger than all of us. I am afraid she will be too strong for you. But no more of that. Let us talk of yourself, old fellow! Come, drive away the gloomy thoughts that crowd upon me here while I am sitting alone and counting the moments until she comes."

Treffenbach looked around the dimly-lit apartment and shivered. "And you live here always, sir?"

"It is the Palazzo Belloni. What more would you have?" his Excellency said, hastily. "We live in grandeur. The whole house is at our disposal. Is that not gorgeous? It belongs to the Menardi family, and the old Princess says we do her a favour by living in it."

Treffenbach covered his face with his hands. His father's every word, the significance of which he perfectly understood, stung him to the quick. The general was living in this ruinous empty old house probably because he had it rent-free. "Where is Violetta?" he asked at last.

The general glanced at the clock: "She is still at the opera-house. She sings Rossini to-night. My boy, I cannot help it. What is to become of her when I am dead? I know that when she talks of providing

for her future it is only a pretence. But indeed her future weighs heavily upon me. Prince Barancovich is my only hope. He is a faithful creature, and has written to me to say that his love is unalterable, and to press his suit; but the stubborn child will have nothing to say to him. To-night, however, is the last performance of the season. Emma went with her, for Signora Contelli sent word that she wished to see me alone this evening: she had something to say to me. But here I am talking of ourselves again while I know nothing of why you have left Brazil. Yes, and look here,—” he interrupted himself in the same feverish, uneasy way, as he stretched out his hand towards some books on the table. “Your works, my dear boy. I am studying them. Tremendously learned. My poor paralyzed brain cannot comprehend them, but I am astounded. Several people—and especially a Spanish diplomatist at the Menardis—lately asked whether I were related to the ‘famous scholar.’”

Treffenbach glanced with a profound sigh towards the volumes, which represented his life’s task. Well, it was completed, and what had he, what had the world, gained thereby? He had often said to himself, as he sat at work, that only scholars and philosophers could appreciate and value his labours, and he had said this with pride rather than with regret, for what cared he for the applause of the multitude? For ten long years he had sacrificed every leisure hour of the day, and many a night, to this work, and now? It all seemed to him more worthless than the paper upon which it was written.

“There is a ring,” said the general. “That must be Signora Contelli. Stay quietly here. She is a worthy woman.”

He had hardly finished speaking when the little lady appeared, hurried and breathless.

"Excuse me, your Excellency," she exclaimed. "I meant to have been here sooner, but I was detained. However, there is still time enough." She sat down to recover breath, not perceiving Magnus, who had withdrawn into the recess of a window.

"Yes, your Excellency, I wanted to say to you before the Bimbina comes,—no starring! Santa Madonna!—the child is singing herself to death. We must be firm. She does not yet know it, but I have put a stop to all the engagements. The impresario has agreed to cancel them. And now there must be eight weeks—twelve weeks, indeed—of absolute rest, or we shall bury the poor little dove in the autumn. She laughs at me, and says she likes it, but there is not a word of truth in that. She has had pains in her chest for days. Yesterday evening she came to her room between the acts looking so that I said, 'Bimbina! what is the matter? Are you ill?' 'Only a little tired,' said she. 'This part is agitating, and I have so much to do.' And she sat down, and her eyes looked so dull and dead. But when she saw that Carlo Ferrati and I were watching her anxiously, she sprang up and threw her arms round my neck, crying merrily, 'Mamma Lucia, do you know that they want me in Paris? And have you heard what they offer me? We shall come back perfect Crœsuses!' and she chattered away just to distract our thoughts; but I could hear how short her breath was, and I know how such a flower can fade and die in a day, and so I determined to speak to you. What shall we do? She must go into the country and drink milk and herb-tea, and sit in the sun, and have no anxiety."

"Yes, my good Signora, I will consult about it with my son here."

The Signora started so that she nearly fell off of her chair. She 'had not seen the Signor,' she asked a 'thousand pardons' for her intrusion, and then she hurriedly took her departure.

After she had gone silence reigned for a while in the lofty, dim apartment. Father and son listened for the striking of the clock. A hundred times Treffenbach thought of asking whether he should not go for Violetta, but the thought of seeing her once more choked the words in his throat.

Friedrich came in now and then, and they could hear him lighting the fire and laying the table in the next room. Then he came in again and whispered to the general, who said to his son, "I hope you did not go to a hotel; Friedrich will lodge you here."

"I might inconvenience you."

"Oh, no, indeed, Herr Baron! We could not let you go elsewhere. Fräulein Emma will attend to everything."

In spite of his melancholy mood, Treffenbach could not help asking how Fräulein Emma performed her part in the green-room as the duenna of a prima donna.

For answer the general began to laugh—to laugh as he had not done for a long, long time.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE 'SOUBRETTE'

"HE is laughing! Positively!" The words were spoken in a half-whisper by a voice at the sound of which Magnus started as if electrified. Through the open door a gray, airy figure came running into the room and to the window where the general sat. Kneeling beside his chair, she exclaimed, "You are laughing! you are happy! Oh, papa, how glad I am!"

"Look, and see who has come."

She uttered a low cry and sprang to her feet; the gray cloak fell from her shoulders, and she stood before him in all the loveliness which he remembered but too well,—the same innocent gayety in her look, the same gentle smile upon her lips, and yet, alas! so altered, so delicate, so ethereal, the eyes grown so large and so supernaturally brilliant, the hand so slight, so transparent, that it seemed as if it must melt away beneath the burning kiss that he imprinted upon it.

She gazed at him for a moment with wide-open eyes, and then she seemed to comprehend that an end had come to all the dreary days; and trembling, laughing, and weeping, she kneeled beside the general again: "Oh, my father, now all will be well. He will take you to Velzin. He will make you well. You will be happy, and so will Emma, and Friedrich too."

"And you?"

"And I?" She laughed gleefully. "I have made my last appearance on the stage to-night."

"Aha! You little hypocrite!"

She blushed, and looked up at Treffenbach with a smile that was as arch as ever. Then suddenly growing grave, she rose and went to him and laid her hand upon his arm: "Ah, how ill, how unhappy you look! Do not be distressed about him, he will get well now. All he wants is happiness."

Then Friedrich opened the doors wide, announced 'Supper is served,' and wheeled the general's chair into the next room, where the round tea-table looked like a small oasis in a desert, and where Fräulein Emma, with the same sentimental face, still tied about with a kerchief, presided over the brass tea-kettle as in happier times she had presided over the silver one. Treffenbach's presence, and the inimitable elegance of his attire, brought the ever-ready tears to the poor Fräulein's eyes. She pressed his hand in silence, and looked at him with inexpressible melancholy. How long it was since she had seen a gentleman who knew how to tie his cravat with so much *chic*! It seemed an eternity!

Treffenbach at first hardly spoke. Violetta's presence, her changed appearance, and her unchanged demeanour, absorbed his thoughts. Fräulein Emma tried in vain to induce him to eat; at last to please her he took something upon his plate, when suddenly it occurred to him that every article of food here was paid for by the health of this pale delicate child, and he could not eat: each morsel would have turned to a coal of fire between his lips.

"I am not hungry, thank you, Emma," he said. "Let me rather discuss plans for the immediate future.

Do you not think, sir," and he turned to his father, "that the air of Velzin must be better than that of Milan in July?"

Violetta's eyes beamed with rapture. The general replied that all depended upon whether the air there would suit *her*; the physician must be consulted.

"None of the physicians here can judge, for they know nothing of Velzin," Treffenbach said, hastily. It seemed to him that if he did not carry her immediately away from here something exquisitely precious and never to be replaced would be lost.

"We will see," said the general, sighing.

At last they arose, and the wheeled chair was rolled away from the table. Violetta took up some embroidery, but she could not remain quiet. She repeatedly threw her arms about the general's neck, entreating him to take courage now and be glad.

At last Friedrich came in to take the general to bed, and Fräulein Emma begged Magnus to allow her to show him his room. He looked around for Violetta: she had vanished; but as, following his guide, he was traversing a wide hall, the girl came up to him, held out both her hands, and whispered gaily, "Good-night, dear Magnus!"

Unable to speak, he carried her hands to his lips. She tried to draw them away. "What is it that troubles you? Why do you kiss my hands?" she asked, shyly, and then, amid tears and smiles, she added, "Ah, how happy I am that God has granted my prayer and brought you back! If papa sighs still, because he naturally thinks more than ever of the trials we have had since those happy days in Teplitz, he will soon forget it all now that he has you with him. And you must never leave him again, Magnus."

She laid her clasped hands upon his arm, and looked up at him beseechingly. "I shall not long be worth much, I know that, and what would become of him afterwards? Do you understand, Magnus?"

For answer he kissed the clasped hands again, and a hot drop fell on them. Then he hurried away, while Violetta stood still and pondered. "A tear! What could grieve him so?" she murmured.

Fräulein Emma was waiting for the Baron at the door of an apartment which looked as empty and desolate as all the other rooms of this palace. But necessity had made the Fräulein inventive, and she had succeeded in giving to the room a habitable appearance.

She had evidently been waiting for this moment in which to pour out her heart; no compunctions of visiting interfered to prevent her from expatiating upon the events of these last years. She was still far from clear as to the why and wherefore of the matter, but the fact was undeniable that on a certain day they had left Como, and the linen, the silver, the furniture, had all been sold at auction "before my very eyes!" she wailed, wringing her hands. "Everything went,—the table-cloth with the stag-hunt,—you remember it, Baron Magnus,—and the two dozen napkins belonging to it. And then that very old table-cloth with St. George and the dragon in the centre,—the damask was like pure white silk. There were seventeen napkins belonging to it,—that brought bad luck, you see. And upon number five there was a big stain that never would wash out, and they said it was stained so when one of your ancestors was shot during the Thirty Years' War, as he was dining in his tent, and holding a wineglass in his hand. Ah, Baron Magnus, I do not yet see why I did not die on that day!"

“Who bought the things?”

“A Jew, a Herr Levison, bought most of them: the very thought of him makes me feel ill.”

“But go on, go on, my dear Emma. So you came here, and Fräulein Violetta went upon the stage?”

“Yes; and I can only wonder what your blessed mother would have said. ‘Emma,’ she used to say to me, ‘you never neglect propriety; you always conduct yourself suitably.’ And now I have to go and wait behind the scenes often, and hear them all laughing, and listen to the silly music, and then at last she comes to me. Ah, she is an angel! But those *Contellis*! They may be very good, but the minute they begin to speak German you can see that they have no education. Why, the street-boys in Berlin speak more correctly! And then, last of all, this house,—a *palace* they call it! Mercy upon us! I should like to show them Charlottenburg. Not a curtain before the windows, and hardly two chairs apiece for each room——”

“Yes; but tell me, have they ever really wanted for anything?”

“Well, sometimes. At first Fräulein Violetta would not eat enough, and the Princess Menardi once sent her a gown. But all that is over now. And I must tell you, too, of something strange that happened to me. Three times there came an envelope, containing three hundred thalers, from a German town, addressed to me, and on a slip of paper inside was written, ‘From an old adorer,—nothing else.’”

The Fräulein simpered self-consciously, and Treffenbach easily divined where the money came from. Hess had not only reflected and drawn conclusions: he had acted upon them.

At last Fräulein Emma noticed the weariness in the

Baron's eyes and withdrew. Friedrich then came to offer his services. "I sleep up here to be near his Excellency," he said. "We are quite alone on this story. The Fräulein Violetta's room is just above this one. She will cough, I know; I have heard her when I have passed through this room at night. But the Herr Baron sleeps sound, and it may not disturb him, for perhaps it will only last an hour. His Excellency does not sleep well; he has been so very ill, and Fräulein Violetta has worn herself out nursing him. I always say to Fräulein Emma, 'Mamsell, the old mistress surely sent our Fräulein down from heaven, for no one but herself could have taken such care of the general.'"

Magnus bit his lip. Was he to learn this lesson from Friedrich too?

What a night! Above him sounded that hoarse cough, torturing him with its steady recurrence. An hour did Friedrich say? He sprang up and lit his candle: his watch told him it was two o'clock, and she had not slept, nor even rested, yet. His anxiety increased. He listened intently, measured the pauses, hoped, and despaired as often as his hope proved vain.

Ah, why in his blind pride and selfish determination had he unclasped her hands and left her two years ago, when she foreboded the coming tempest, and, shrinking from the future in terror, had looked to him as to a protector?

If he had remained, everything would have been different. True, he would have had to share in the disgrace, instead of standing proudly aloof, but he could have guarded them all from misery, poverty, and illness.

Towards morning the cough was hushed. He might

have slept, since the disturbance—if the muffled sound could be so called—had ceased. But he was less than ever able to sleep, for a fresh anxiety assailed him. The cough had been irritating; this silence was appalling. He fancied the last sound had been like a dying sigh. What if she were no longer living? Who was up there with her in the ghastly solitude of this house to help her, and to soothe her if pain and darkness should terrify her?

He tossed about restlessly, gazing at the windows in hopes of perceiving the dawn. At last it appeared, and his exhaustion was so great that he sank into a heavy slumber.

When he awoke the sun was high in the heavens. He looked about him bewildered: the beneficent oblivion of sleep still clogged his senses. Where was he? Opposite him stretched a lofty sea-green wall, with pictured palms and grotesque flowers, and a panther-hunt painted in the midst of them. On one side of the room the colours on the wall were obliterated, and here there was a yawning fireplace; the tiled floor was broken and cracked in spots,—the room was drearily spacious. The windows were magnificent, and the apartment this morning was flooded with light, which revealed as the only furniture, two high-backed chairs covered with faded, ragged satin damask, and a table with thin gilt legs. The sad reality flashed upon his mind and roused him fully.

Upon going to the general's room he found only Fräulein Emma, who had a cup of hot coffee for him, and who told him that his Excellency was always taken out for an airing in his wheeled chair by Friedrich at this hour of the morning. He might return now at any minute.

"And Violetta?" he asked, with a throbbing heart.

"She is probably up-stairs with her flowers."

"Can I go up?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; you cannot miss your way. Her flowers are on the roof, or the lodge, as they call it here. Go directly up the staircase and straight on, and you will find her."

Hardly giving himself time to drink his coffee, he hurried away and up the wide stairease. There was the same decay and neglect visible everywhere,—the house was indeed on the road to ruin. In the bright sunshine which penetrated even to these halls, everything looked worse than ever. He wandered about above-stairs for a few moments, until, at the end of a broad gallery, which was open to the air on one side, defended only by a balustrade, he saw two blooming oleanders in tubs. Here the gallery led out into a square terrace, whence, high above all the noise of the street, there was a beautiful prospect. Flowers were blooming and vines wreathing everywhere here, and in the midst of this little garden sat Violetta, her hands clasped in her lap, gazing out towards the distant horizon. Her dark hair curled low upon her forehead; she wore a white gown, with a scarlet knot at her throat; her delicate profile stood out clear against the blue Italian sky. A letter lay on the ground at her feet. When she perceived Treffenbach she picked it up and came towards him. "We did not expect to see you so early," she said. "Papa has gone for his walk."

"Violetta, my poor child, how you suffered last night!"

"Did you hear me? Oh, I am so sorry! I must have disturbed you."

“Does that go on every night?”

“Oh, no, not always! But please do not say anything about it to papa. I really am so grateful to that convenient considerate cough: it comes only in the night, and does not interfere with my singing, which is the chief consideration. But look here, Magnus, I have had such a dear letter from the Countess Hess. She invites me to spend the holidays with them. I shall answer her immediately, but—but—”

“But you cannot, you must not leave my father, Violetta, and he must come with me to Velzin.”

“No, I cannot leave him yet,” she said, simply.

He sat down beside her upon the broad breastwork of the wall, and they looked down for a while in silence upon the roofs, the streets, and the gardens where children were playing. “This is my garden up here,” Violetta said, gaily, at last. “Friedrich brought up the earth and planted the flowers for me. They grow luxuriantly, as you see. I like to sit here, when I have time, and fancy that it is indeed a home,—such a home as I know yours was once, Magnus.”

“Oh, Violetta,” he broke forth, “if you will but let me give you such a home,—care for you, wait upon you, surround you with the affection of—of—” he hesitated; the passionate words that came thronging to his lips seemed so unjustified, so premature, that he suppressed them, and ended with—“of the tenderest brother.”

“But what could you do? I need no care. I am very well. Yet all the same,—she blushed and laid her hand on his,—“all the same you must know that I dearly like to call you my brother. I am only afraid sometimes it displeases you.”

“It is natural that you should feel so, and I richly

deserve to have you tell me so," he rejoined; "but one thing, Violetta, you must hear from me. Since I last saw you not a day has passed in which I have not thought of you; with what pain and longing I should be afraid to tell you,—not a day on which I have not taken out your picture, which still lies next my heart, and—and—gazed at it, fancying that I could hear your dear voice, your silvery laugh. Oh, my darling, you never were forgotten, but the thought of you pierced my heart with a thousand pangs, blind, egotistical fool that I have been!"

She had looked up at him at first with a smile; now she rose hastily, and with a timid glance at his pale, agitated face, she shrank from him in evident distress, and said, "Come, we must go; I cannot stay up here any longer. Papa will have returned, and he will be wanting you." And she vanished like some fleet-footed fawn, and he was left to find his way alone through the labyrinth of galleries and corridors to his father's room.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CONCLUSION

"ONCE upon a time there was a king——"

"Hanna, my child, you will spoil our lake for Violetta with that stupid story."

"Stupid story?" A storm of indignant remonstrance burst from five childish throats, and through it rang a soft, musical laugh, while the tempest was soothed to rest by the gentle entreaty, "Let Hanna go

on, my dear Magnus; nothing can spoil this lake for me." There upon the broad breast of the dam the childish group is gathered again. Hanna, now a tall maiden, has the youngest in her lap, and beside her sits Violetta, the pale, delicate creature who, since she came to Velzin, has made herself adored by old and young, and who thinks the spot a very heaven.

Broad as the breast of the dam is, Baron Treffenbach thinks it necessary to station himself on the other side of Violetta, lest she should fall into the water.

Of the lake before them and of the purple gleaming moor behind them he sees nothing. His whole attention is given to the airy white figure beside him; he watches every change in her face, listens with eager anxiety for every tone of her voice. A slight cough is heard, and Treffenbach says hastily, "Violetta, was that you coughing?"

"I? Oh, no!" she replies, turning towards him, only to look away again instantly with a sudden blush.

"I coughed," little Lena, her apron full of berries, said, with an air of importance. "That last blackberry was such a big one."

Treffenbach looked relieved. "Do you drink all the milk that you were ordered every day, Violetta?"

"No, that she doesn't," her treacherous friends declared loudly. "We saw her give half of it to-day to a beggar-boy!"

"But, Violetta!"

"But, Magnus! Do let Hanna finish her story. I am so curious to hear it."

And Hanna tells the legend, and the gray and white curlews confirm it with their shrill screams, the tiny

waves splash at the foot of the dam, and the old fir-trees rustle.

Oh, she was so happy! What if he had once repulsed her and fled from her? Now his time, his care, and his interest were all for her. His only thought was of her restoration to perfect health. Where the forest bordered on the moor he had had built for her an open pavilion, in which the general could sit in his wheeled chair, and where Violetta, beside him, could drink in the fresh, delicious breath of the moorland. But she was never permitted to read aloud. Treffenbach would not even let her busy herself with her embroidery. He would read the paper or some book to his father, while the young girl, half reclining on a low divan, gave herself over to pleasant waking dreams and to the healing power of the sunshine and air.

Sometimes, soothed by the voice of the reader, the lids would droop over the violet eyes until the long lashes lay on the pale cheek, and then involuntarily Magnus would lower his voice, and pause and lose himself in contemplation of the innocent, childlike face.

And Violetta was gradually recovering all that she had lost. There came days when roses bloomed once more upon her cheeks and she was the Violetta of former times. She was so happy, whether roaming over the moor, or rendering to the general the hundred little services which he had been used to receive at her hands, or sitting in silence beside his wheeled chair, her hand in his, while he talked with his son as in the old times, or playing with the happy group of children at the parsonage, where she was immediately at home with Frau Ehrhardt and the good pastor. Her life now seemed to her one long

holiday. To Frau Ehrhardt especially she turned with what soon became an almost daughterly affection, and from her she learned of the life of the former mistress of Velzin, of the early days of Magnus, and of the almost idolatrous affection of the son for the mother.

Count and Countess Hess drove over to Velzin one day, finding their way into the old house through the wilderness of roses, and the Count discovered Fräulein Emma behind the door of a wardrobe, whence he drew her forth to present her to his wife in spite of her excuses for not appearing on account of a swelled face. He would listen to nothing, averring stontly that she was always handsome enough.

Countess Marie Louise was seated beside the general's wheeled chair when Violetta entered the room. Count Hess went forward to greet her, took both her hands and carried them to his lips, and then led her to his wife. "Here she is," was all he said.

Confused and blushing, Violetta confronted the beautiful woman. This, then, was she who was to have been Magnus's wife. The poor child felt as if in her mother's name she ought even now to entreat forgiveness.

And if the cordial reception that Marie Louise gave the girl was due at first to her love for her husband, half an hour had not passed before Violetta had thoroughly won her heart, so that on the way home she exclaimed, "I cannot understand why Magnus should hesitate any longer!"

Yes, why hesitate any longer? This was Magnus's own thought when Hanna finished her legend and a profound silence ensued, so profound that the clock upon the tower of the manor-house was distinctly heard to

strike. "We must go home," said Hanna. "Mamma will be waiting supper for us."

The children scrambled down, and little Ella took Violetta's hand and whispered, "Isn't it a beautiful story?"

"Ah, it is so sad. I am so sorry for the poor water-witch!"

"The water-witch?" cried Ella, her blue eyes wide with wonder. "But you mustn't be sorry for her; you must be sorry for the king."

"Oh, no, she is by far the more wretched. She cannot make him happy, and all he thinks of is how to escape from her."

This astounding view of the story so impressed Ella that she hurried after the others to impart it to them.

Violetta was still standing on the dam, gazing thoughtfully down into the water, when she felt a hand clasp hers. "My darling," said Treffenbach, "do not go. And do not take your hand from mine, Violetta," for the girl shrank from him timidly, "but tell me if I have not done penance enough?"

"Penance?" she repeated.

"Yes; you punish me severely, Violetta, for all the wrong I have done and thought. I do not say the punishment is undeserved, but it is none the less hard to bear. You avoid me,—you reply to me with hesitation. It reminds me of the time when you were afraid of me."

"I am not afraid of you now."

"But you despise me."

"Oh, heavens!"

"Do you not, Violetta? Then promise me to live always in the old gray house as its mistress,—still a

daughter to my father, and to me—a guardian angel, a priceless treasure, all that life holds dear while life shall last."

She cast one glance towards the old house, then turned away and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, why have you said this, Magnus?" she asked, with a sob. "It cannot be. And—and now I must not stay here."

"Why can it not be?"

She clasped her hands in front of her; the breeze played among her curls, and the declining sun seemed to bathe her in its beams, as she said, gently, looking him full in the face, "Magnus, when you left us and paid no heed to my entreaty, I was still a child. Since then I have thought much, and many things have become clear to me. I know, too, why you went away. You did right to go."

He grew pale. This was bitter indeed.

"For you know," Violetta went on, her cheeks crimson, "it was a great misfortune for your family when your father married my poor mother. I understand everything now, and I know that it never should have been. And it must not be that a second Baron Treffenbach shall marry a Fouquet. It is for your sake that I say 'no,' Magnus; for you are proud,—proud of your name, and of your position, which is far above mine, and you have lofty aims in life. Still, I had hoped that there might always be a place here in Velzin for me beside your father's chair. But now—now I must go forth into the world again."

"Try that at your peril!"

"You cannot prevent it, Magnus. It would be too hard and cruel."

"And have you no thought for me, Violetta?—for

the love that has dwelt in my heart ever since I heard your laugh for the first time; for the pain, the anxiety, the constant longing that have tortured me for two long years? But why should I ask you to think of this?" he suddenly interrupted himself. "I deserve nothing,—least of all that priceless heart."

"Ah, you and your father are both so dear, so dear to me! Do not doubt it," she implored him.

"Yes, dear as a father and a brother."

"Indeed, indeed you are!"

"Did you ever have a brother?"

She shook her head.

"Then you cannot know how a brother is loved."

Utterly conquered by the yearning affection in his eyes, her colour deepening still, she suddenly clasped her arms about his neck, looked up into his face, and whispered, "Is it thus?"

And it was the third time that this had happened to him.

Had he grown wise at last?

The old firs on the purple moor and the curlews above the lake could have answered this question if they had chosen. For they were witnesses of the kiss of betrothal.

And there was perhaps one other witness, some one who, sauntering along the shore of the lake, had been gazing towards the dam, a smile on his lips which even his drooping moustache could not conceal. It was terribly indiscreet, to say the least, to advance so noiselessly and so curiously, and we are very sorry just now, when we are taking final leave of a very agreeable man, to be obliged to display him in so disadvantageous a light, but truth before everything!

"Let me offer my eongratulations," he said, softly. And Magnus, startled, gazed at him as if he never had seen him before.

But Violetta, blushing, laughing, crying, all at once, turned to him with all the elastic vivacity of her nature, and put out both her hands: "Oh, don't! oh, don't! Rather save me from him. Tell him how wrong it would be. Oh, how wickedly thoughtless I was just now,—when—when you saw——!"

"I saw nothing," Count Armin asserted, unblushingly.

"I do not want to hurt him; and I *do* want to live in the old gray house; and I do want to do all that I can while life lasts to make him and his father happy," she went on. "But I have told him already that there ought to be no other marriage between a Baron Treffenbach and a Fouquet. Am I not right?"

Both men only gazed at her with delight, paying but little heed to what she had to say, as Magnus, drawing her gently to him, and stroking baek the curls from her forehead, said, in a voice trembling with emotion, "My darling, the only question here is whether any Treffenbach who ever lived, or who ever can live was or can be worthy a Violetta Fouquet."

THE END

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